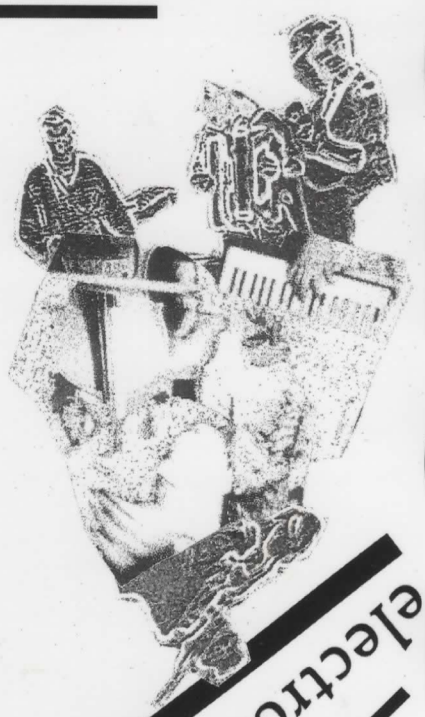
The Sound Projector music magazine 11th issue 2003

THE SOUND PROJECTOR

11th



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Two thousand and 03

Seattle music and art

avant-blurpho

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CLIMAX GOLDEN TWINS
JESSE PAUL MILLER
DAVE KNOTT
MATT SHOEMAKER
SCOTT COLBURN

Francisco Lopez
William Basinski
Mnortham
Mark Wastell
Vagina Dentata Organ

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This SPECIAL SEATTLE ISSUE features five interviews with Seattle-based artists and musicians, some splendid guys whom I met during April 2002 during a two week stay over there. They are all friends of each other, so there is a little - erm - overlap between the five interviews. Nirvana fans should note that the so-called 'grunge' scene, I'm here to report, exists only as nostalgia as far as I can tell, and forms no part of the marginal underground musical endeavours reflected in these articles. (EP)

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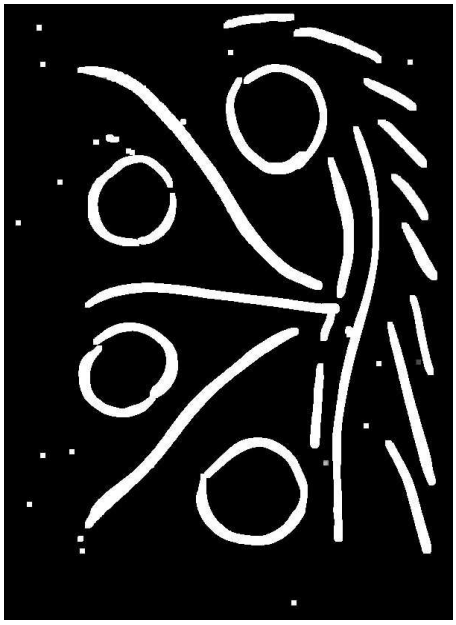
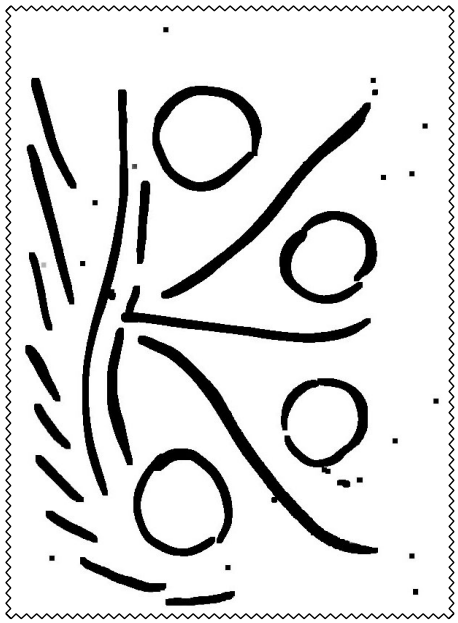
17 VIII 02 Ed Pinsent J.Bagnall

ATOMS OF PURE ✖✖ NOISE ✖✖

SHRIEKING RUINS MAKE OXTAIL SOUP BODY DAMAGE





Deepkiss 720

Pace x Friction

UNITED KINGDOM HARBINGER 020 VINYL LP (2001)

A nice artefact - looks and sounds lovely. A picture disc with much graphical psychedelic vomit etched into its grooves - the A side is a crazy riot of colours, process dots, optical effects and ripped-up photographs. Looks good enough to eat with an electric forchette, assuming you're an acidhead with the appetite for mind-expanding experiences and a vinyl pizza on the side. The music on this side is random series of manic cut-ups, ripped from the grooves of (I assume) rave, dance and techno records - there's tons of heavy drum machines, electropop synthy noises, funky grooves, and such like. Every stolen record is sampled, sped-up and slowed-down, and generally fucked over in a rough-hewn manner by Mr Deepkiss, using his Technics decks and his big hairy hands. A concoction like this would be perfect for torturing dancing fools at a nightclub - see if you can leap up and down in time to *this*! If, like me, you have ever been troubled by the rigid inflexibility of dance-beat type music, then this record's shoot-em-up approach will sabotage all of that in a very nice way. At the same time of course, it generates a satisfying noise in its own right - feedback, harshness, controlled explosions, filtered synths - and it hops from one astro-splurge to the next like a kangaroo on amphetamines.

The other side has artwork dominated by a kaleidoscopic image of a big-breasted naked woman lying on a stripey mattress, plus more torn-up graphic shit - some of these fragments are the track titles, which turn out to be fairly crass in tone - eg 'Sound is the Ape of Light', 'Where did you gore baby?', and 'Cheerleader Tryouts (Uprocker)'. The sonic experiments on this side are further examples of rootless and disorganised fragmented, naggy noise, stumbling along in charmingly aimless fashion. Impossible to discern, or to describe, what on earth may be happening to inscribe these vague, sketchy paragraphs of sound on the vinyl - it's like cut-up sentences without any paragraphs or punctuation. Later, we return to more manipulated fuckery with beat records - funky pop distorto mess collided with harsh blasts and shrieks, consummating this unholy mixture of dance music and industrial noise. Well, Bom-de-boom! Some Japanese influence is clear - eg the work of Hanatarashi in the celebration and melding of mismatched aural junk, but not quite as fierce in the use of violent edits. I suppose the crass porno elements are meant to remind us of Merzbow, but Deepkiss doesn't come anywhere close to that man's league when it comes to shocking art imagery. Still, a fine record nonetheless.

ED PINSENT 23/11/2002

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Thomas Dimuzio

Live at Generator

USA GENERATOR GA-15 CD (2001)

Fab solo American noisenik whomps it up live with his vats of electric junk. You need more records by Dimuzio so why not acquire this one - 12 years old and a rare vintage too. Amazingly, for something with such a masterly and convincing delivery, this is Dimuzio's first ever solo concert. Gen Ken Montgomery recorded it at his Generator sound gallery concern in New York in March 1990, but the history of it goes back to the 1980s, Diumzio's earlier experiments, and Gen Ken's interest in hearing them (indeed in hearing as much weird music as he possibly could, mostly on cassettes, which is how the scene throve back then). The Generations Unlimited label put out the first Dimuzio LP *Headlock* in 1989 - since reissued on CD by ReR, but still tough to find. 'It was impossible to tell from his recordings how he was making all that sound,' muses Gen Ken. That still applies when you listen to this sprawling chaos on record, and even reading through the list of equipment - lots of synths, a digital delay unit and a delay system, plus sampling keyboards and a mixing board - leave you little the wiser. Naturally, what's important is the man in the driving seat who has the expertise to make all this gear leap into action. With his bangs, buzzes, echoes, crackling, and metallic shivering timbers, Dimuzio conveys unearthly grandeur, a sense

of rapid travel and movement, a multitude of foreign voices blending into a babel, foreboding buildings, flashing lights, mountains of concrete and clay formed into terrifying ziggurats - all the experiences of modern city life in fact, and what greater city to depict in this regard than NYC? Dimuzio also conveys excitement, meeting bizarre strangers, out-of-control street parties, ingesting hallucinogenic drugs and excessive amounts of alcohol, and witnessing unexpected fatalities in traffic. A good companion piece to Gen Ken's (calmer) recording captured from his apartment window (see the Environmental Section); take the two together to form a coherent view of modern urban life.

ED PINSENT 07/11/2002

PO Box 1168, New York, NY 10028, USA
www.generatorsoundart.org

Ilios
b.a
GREECE ANTIFROST AFRO2011 3" CD (2002)

bEFORE aFTER….bRASIL aRGENTINA….bANANAS aVOCADO….
These are three alternatives offered by the artist (or perhaps the label) as to the titular status of this occult artefact which has travelled to these northern isles from Athens via Barcelona. Minimalist of design, cryptic of intention, the objects emerging under the Antifrost banner seem to share a certain elegance in their neat rebuttal of overt signification, preferring to pursue a sort of cold Zen etiquette. Reminds me of a line from Wallace Stevens (in 'The Snow Man', I do believe) where he makes reference to 'the nothing that is not there and the nothing that is'. I'm not sure whether nothing is there or not there when I listen to this CD- oh sure, there's *something* there, as in it's not silent, but I think to fuss over the something might be to miss the point- what stays with me after the disc ends certainly isn't the something (which is, phenomenologically speaking, pretty ordinary) but the polarities of plus and minus nothing between which the sound finds its body. Keeping up at the back, there? Stay with me- I'm worth it.

Of course I hadn't heard of Ilios- my knowledge of modern Greek music stops at Xenakis and Aphrodite's Child- but apparently they've been at it for ten years, founding the Antifrost label, staging multimedia events, collaborating with various luminaries including the ubiquitous Thurston Moore, and generally 'avin it large, mashin' it up, etc. 'Been using electronics to re-de-construct music that is different in each released work in order to defend an anti-career' the press-release guiltily admits, in a line that could almost be reworked as a talking blues. Well, power to Ilios for owning up. It would have been so easy to pretend they were Westlife, with all the perks that could entail, but no- these (?boys?) have told it like it is, in words and in eloquent, glossy nothing.

Essentially the ebb and flow of unidentifiable, unlocatable sound-patterns that constitutes *b.a* strikes me as a good old-fashioned Romantic tone-poem, not so very far removed from Schubert or Strauss: it emerges from silence, crescendoing slowly to a climax in which dissonance is served, and dying away whence it came. The difference is purely dialectic: the underlying myth endures- and why shouldn't it, since the vegetable cycles and the resurrecting sun-gods aren't going anywhere in a hurry, and human beings will always need to revisit these cosmic earth-mysteries (regardless of what trainers we're wearing nowadays). So we begin with murmurous crackles, like the rustle of dead leaves or rain on the school roof during an eternity of double-physics….Notes emerge through the static, green and frail….An ominous rattle rises to meet them, like something out of Afro-Cuban Santeria, or perhaps a malfunctioning geiger-counter….From here it builds up and up into declamatory Frankensteins of noise, a monster in every organ of my body, flailing and bashing down walls. The sound of death. Tormented by excessive flange, the beasts are reddened and rolled in salt before galloping off into a nightscape of random havoc, leaving us to clean up. Sure enough, it's a downhill slide into gentle clicking and humming to see us abed.

bOTOX aPATHY? bRONZE aRTICHOKE? bLOCKED aNUS? You should probably decide for yourself….

JONATHAN HELLIER

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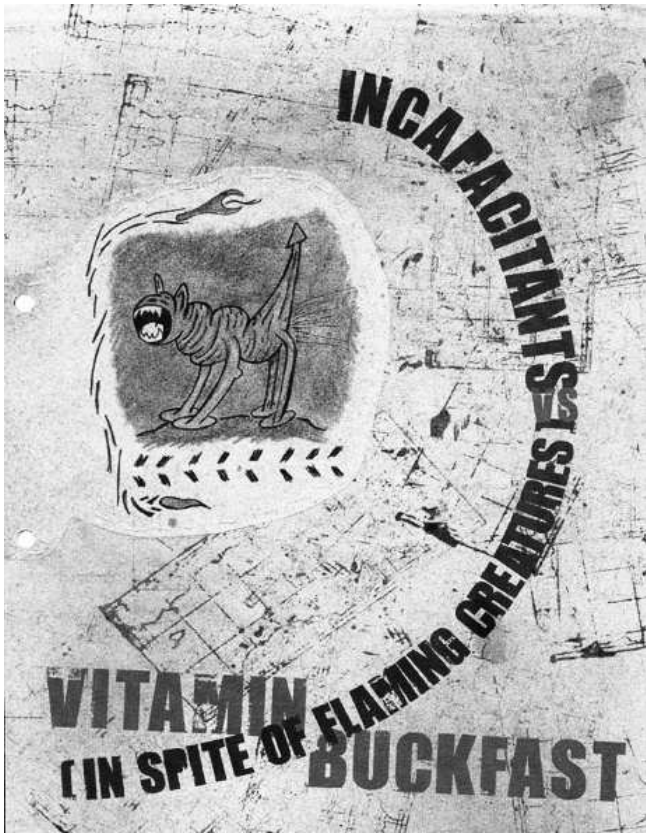

Incapacitants VS (In Spite Of Flaming Creatures)
Vitamin Buckfast
USA STARLIGHT FURNITURE CO 15 VINYL LP (2002)

A shrieking ruin of destructive, free-form amplified noise. Two sides of exhilarating racket, ostensibly divided into six 'tracks', but there's no real separation to speak of. Incapacitants are the Japanese duo Mikawa and Kosakai, salarymen by day, noisemakers by night -notorious for their release *As Loud As Possible*, a title which describes their direct approach to their art. Here, they play wild electronics, Theremin and ring modulator - the latter two renowned as devices which have capacity to generate unpleasant noise by the truckload. (In Spite of Flaming Creatures), a ridiculous name which seems to reference the famous underground movie by Jack Smith, turns out to be a solo turn - apparently one Abdul H Squeerter, who plays 'instruments'. The track titles - if indeed they are tracks, which I doubt - use Joycean wordplay in an attempt to match the insanity of the raging music-din; 'Fire from an Indian violin', 'A Brand New denture', 'From Pig's Eye to Eel', and 'No Wrist Pride'. Strange juxtapositions of images there - animals, incongruous objects and loose body parts, suggestive of the violent amputations and mix-matching these maniacs intend to inflict on you, physically and mentally. Certainly, this noise of theirs does have great dynamics - if that's how you'd describe the harsh, yelping electro dagger-slices shooting out of the rolling mass of thunderclouds. The odd thing I often find with harsh noise is that, despite the power that feeds into it (measured in terms of human sweat and brain activity, and electronic voltage consumed), it can leave the listener feeling lumpen and leaden, as if the body were trying to digest a big suet dumpling. Maybe this dense music is simply loaded with aural carbohydrates; it doesn't really energise or empower the listener much, just leaves you trapped under a suffocating blanket. This may not be a bad thing, though. If you have the intestinal stamina and can make it to the B-side, you'll enjoy a muscular roarage - tornadoes behaving like vacuum cleaners - with glorpy, mangled voices buried in solid bricks of matted hair and gunk, yorking inanely to themselves in fits of chatty delirium. A perfect soundtrack to a bout of food poisoning. Great sleeve art - kind of low-budget *Juxtapoz* magazine material, delineated by artist Karen Lollypop.

ED PINSENT 23/11/2002

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www.midheaven.com

Jazzkammer

Sound Of Music

NORWAY [OHM] RECORDS 1.0

3" CD (2002)

A welcome return to solid face-slapping blasteroid form by John Hegre and Lasse Marhaug, the reigning kings of crazed Oslo electronica, and something much needed if they wanna regain some cred after their previous limp live outing with Merzbow from 2001. *Sound Of Music* is an energy vitamin burst captured at one of their rare live performances - this one from Club Milk in Tokyo. Notch up the volume, lads. These guys both understand that full-blooded noise is a necessary part of a man's life, as important as your daily pint of milk and daily loaf of bread - noise is not a weapon with which to lay waste the world, but a mighty roar to wake up the dormant potential that lies within all of us; if not that, then a simple cleansing suckamaroon to vacuum out the crevices of the brain. Using computers, guitars, minidisc player and general electronic malarkey, they unleash a warm, rich and very human-scaled ball of sound, whose consistency is as thick as a good oxtail soup. 'The performance was so intense that John started bleeding on his guitar,' remarks the press release, before directing us to a website that specialises in the history of band-aids. If, as title suggests, the 'hills are alive' with this sound of music, it would seem that the hills have come to life in spectacular mutant style, growing huge arms and legs and running across the earth like outsize Terry Gilliam animations hell-bent on wreaking mischief.

ED PINSENT 04/11/2002

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Merzbow

A Taste Of ...

AUSTRIA MEGO 040

CD (2002)

By the time you see this review, we may safely reckon that a million other reviews have already asked the $64,000 question: 'Yes but what does this CD have to do with Japanese food?' - or with food generally, apart from the track titles and accompanying artwork. Might not the answer be: Nothing at all! - it's merely a joke on either Akita's part or that of Mego, seeing that this recording might be Mego's first foray into noise territory proper as opposed to releasing CDs that happen to be noise-influenced? If you take this view then there's the implication that Mego plans to release more Merzbow recordings in future so the Mego fans who might also be Merz-virgins had better prepare themselves by listening to *A Taste Of ...*. The recent news that Akita himself has converted to the vegetarian lifestyle and now raises chickens in his house (I've heard they have their own room) may or may not have any bearing on the concept behind the CD although samples in Track 2 suggest the screams of small creatures being shredded of their feathers, shells or other integuments and then being deepfried into delicious tempura by the heat rays from Akita's laptop.

The music is dominated by rhythm above all and Akita delights in pummelling the audience with as many rhythm loops as he can, all of them manipulated and made pretty extreme regardless of the nature of the source material (which in Track 1 might have been really kitschy and cartoony, judging from the results). There is of course the familiar sandstorm that continually blasts away though it sometimes disappears in Track 3 and we end up with bits of almost-López-style space in the background! Whooppee! Of course, this only means that when the torrents of junk-noise resume, they explode even more brain cells than they normally do when the storm is constant. And Track 4 sounds different again, sort of three or even four-dimensional. If ever you needed an introduction to the Merz-universe, this recording is ideal: the rhythms rise out of the ongoing storms to give them structure and make the noise 'accessible' to new ears; at the same time, Merzbow plays with them, opposing different sets of loops to create more tension and terror, and builds up the noise with even more rhythm samples. Long-time fans no doubt will be enthralled by this rhythmic approach.

If you give your imagination free rein while listening to this CD, you can see an overworked cook running amok in a restaurant kitchen whirling noodles above his head into ever ropier strands and lassoing screaming waiters and customers to tie them up in loops of flour; he sends woks, and steel knives clattering along the tables and upturns vats of deep-frying oil over the floor - sssssss it all goes. Pans of pork gyoza or mandoo dumplings are sent flying to the ceilings and walls, splattering the little morsels everywhere. Just as you thought - that's not pork in those dumplings, that's really ... A movie about psychochefs, noodle bondage, flying meat cleavers and terrible things being done to poultry and eggs in the dark starring if you like Merzbow (who in real life is probably the gentlest and most self-effacing of Nature's creations) or if you prefer the cult Hong Kong actor Anthony Chau-ming Wong (who seems to have made playing psychos and villains a personal specialty though I've only seen him in one movie *The Heroic Trio: The Executioners* with Michelle Yeoh and the luminous Maggie Cheung) with a soundtrack from Merzbow - now that would be one hell of a movie indeed.

JENNIFER HOR

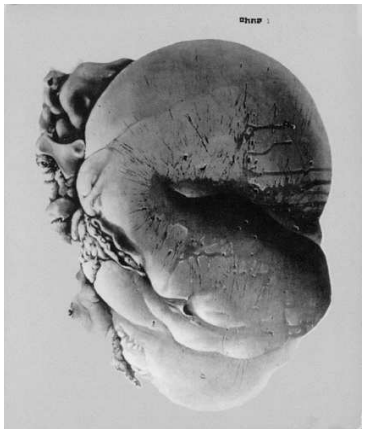
www.mego.at

Ohne

1

AUSTRIA OHNEMEGO 1

CD (2002)



A truly original work of extremely ugly-beautiful half-assed genius-stupidity, and something that no-one can afford not to investigate right now - at the risk of suffering the form of brain-rot reserved for neglected tropical goldfish floating in a bowl. I think this Ohne release comes close to fulfilling the Mego compact, in an unexpected way. My wild supposition is that the label's founders (Pita Rehberg in particular) always wanted to make a totally absurdist statement, and plumped for releasing the most extreme examples of digital electronica possible, simply in order to attract attention, piss people off and provoke a strong reaction. Needless to say the joke backfired, as soon as Christian Fennesz became identified as the 'talent' of the label and praised by all and sundry as a serious artist. The other players in the Mego catalogue - and there are many - tended to be appraised by timid critics in the light of this discovery. The Mego hardcore shock-troops tried to retaliate with such grotesque absurdities as *The Magic Sound of Fenn O' Berg*, Pure's *The End of Vinyl*, Hecker's reductionist monstrosities, the General Magic pranksterism, and the patently ridiculous naked guitar band Fuckhead. But still the critics raved (myself among them).

Well, suck on this. Maybe this intolerable beast of burden will silence everybody once and for all. Belched out from a nameless orifice in the studio by four marginal loons. One of them, Daniel Lowenbruck, is known to me - he produced an astonishing piece of aural nonsense called *Luxury Discreet Surroundings* in 1999, whose profound meaninglessness haunts me to this day. Daniel also manages the Tochnit Aleph label in Germany, home to fine noisy wildmen. The other buffoons in this Ohne circus are Dave Phillips of Schimpfluch-Gruppe; Om Myth, (ie Tom Smith) of To Live And Shave in LA, and producer of some of the most unlistenable recordings ever made; and Reto Maeder of RM74, whatever that may be. Composed mainly of voices of the three performers maltreated through the mixing desk by Maeder, Ohne's CD is a perplexing and indigestible mess of incomprehensibility. It's one of those rare recordings that it's virtually impossible to remember anything about, and might even appear to be new and different every time you play it - assuming you're prepared to air it more than once in your life. It makes no sense whatsoever.

Wrapped in horrendous sleeve art which might depict an unpleasant object somewhere between a cancerous liver or an aborted foetus (or a malevolent plasticine sculpture which aspires to depict both), this Ohne record presents us with things - like these diseased interior organ-viscera elements - which

we would rather not know about, the manifestation of bad thoughts which we would prefer to bury in a ditch. The disjointed, random methodology in the editing and the general queasiness of the vile sounds will induce nausea in the listener - I certainly wanted to vomit more than once. No conventional 'pleasure' at all, just a big dose of mind-altering and body-damaging weirdness, like chewing on a huge chunk of deep-frozen sick laced with LSD. Even the very typeface of the Mego logo has been distorted to fit the band's name. 'Deal with it, you bastards', snarls the aggressive press release. Now, will everyone finally get the point?

ED PINSENT 03/11/2002

www.mego.at
http://ohne.educations.net

Six and More

Way Out

GERMANY ARCHEGON GON 1006 CD (2002)

Shapeless, infuriating and inchoate drivel from the friends of Gunther Scroth, the man who gave the world *Barcode Music* in 2000 (see issue nine). A small army of European nobodies collaborated to produce this - 16 slices of a very over-egged pudding. It's a sprawling, undisciplined mass of semi-musical racket. Everyone is credited in maddening detail on the inner sleeve by an efficient chart which uses Wingding symbols, like an extract from a guidebook describing features of hotels in Europe which you really wouldn't want to visit. The chart method is also used to describe their range of instrumentation, which comprises virtually every combination imaginable of electronic and acoustic instruments, samplers, turntables, electronic effects, and non-musical junk objects. When Six and More began their musical career, they first performed in a barn, where their work was apparently 'of great interest to the cows'. Then they did it in a converted beer cellar in Munich, where much of this CD was recorded. The photos on the cover, I have to admit, do depict a happy-looking and fun-loving bunch of people, so perhaps it's small-minded of me to rain on their parade. Their dress and demeanour suggests to me the unfettered bohemian spirit of what (I imagine) European free-playing used to be like in the 1970s. But then, maybe that spirit is long past - an extinct animal, much like 'The Last Dodo', to whom they pay musical tribute in a touching 6:39 track. But whatever the good intentions of Scroth and cohorts, the recorded results here are sloppy, worthless, muck.

ED PINSENT 16/11/2002

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Svstriate

Whole Year Inn

USA GLARE.CON.ST/RUCTION GLARE01 CD-R (2002)

A new release from Andrew Campbell, the Californian sound artist who first came our way with the solo releases *Stem* and *Infurs* (see last issue). This is another auto-release on CD-R, but it seems he's garnering interest in Japan; so let's hope he gets signed up to a productive record deal soon, as he is a highly intelligent noiseician who's clearly learning how to control his dynamics expertly and make the power of extreme noise work in his favour. There's plenty of his trademark factory blast-outs and supersonic jet-engine roars, but they're combined with a barrel of more varied effects, everything laid out together like animal pelts caught by a Canadian trapper. He weaves elements together subtly, without over-reliance on jarring editing effects to prove his point. Out of alien chords, there grow even more alien drones; constantly mutating like a basket of mercury poured onto the kitchen floor of an Albanian chef. Static and radio bursts creep in, with a fragment of a weather report here and some nameless screeching birds flying past there; disconnected narratives start to link up. A fascinating abstraction which satisfies the intellect as well as the more basic human need for loud, aggressive power noise. Another interesting example of Svstriate's bronze foundry craft.

ED PINSENT 26/12/2002

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To Live And Shave In L.A.

The Wigmaker in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg

USA MENLO PARK RECORDINGS MPK 7020 2 X CD (2002)

I should wait ten years before attempting to review this double set; even then I still might not be able to assimilate everything in it. To put it very simply, *Wigmaker* is a noise recording in the full sense: it's extremely dense and complex, it's aggressive and violent, and the information overload is such it would split and splinter the most sophisticated sound entertainment centre into sub-atomic particles if played at the required volume levels (that is, the highest the system can afford before bursting into flames). The texture of the music is harsh, and samples and bursts of sound tumble in a huge tsunami aiming straight for those tender little brain cells of yours. The relentless pounding of samples, jump cuts and effects all compressed together so that nothing appears to last longer than a second or two induces an immediate gut reaction: you keel over backwards and let the whole thing flatten you senseless. (The music is actually more varied than the foregoing suggests, but the effect is the same.) *Dusted* Magazine's reviewer Max Black refers to this visceral music experience as 'like watching a high-rise demolition that goes on for two continuous hours'; he forgot to add the effect of watching the demolition close up: the heat, the dust, the debris, the very force of the explosions hit you and knock you clean out.

Then there are the lyrics: I had an easier time reading Thomas Pynchon's *Mason and Dixon* with its dense pseudo-18th century spelling and grammar. I find the lyrics to be an odd mix of steamy hubba-hubba porn and Early Modern English poetry with its sonnets and rhyming couplets, really convoluted and impenetrable - but you gotta admire TLASILA main man Tom Smith for assuming that everyone who listens to *Wigmaker* has rocket scientist intelligence. (He is after all the man who wanted to produce The Menstruation Sisters.) All this language is delivered in an over-the-top bombastic style of a fruitcake evangelical fundamentalist preacher. Smith's singing is a sleazy, slippery drawl that dips into hellfire and brimstone screeching and a rare bit of crooning, but is mostly monotonous and declamatory to the point where you're virtually hypnotised or numbed from all that haranguing - plus it's very heavily treated.

Ah yes, the famous production that took five years - amazingly, the recording doesn't sound at all laboured or precious, it actually sounds spontaneous and it breathes freely, as if Mr Smith did the whole thing in five hours flat rather than five years. You've got information overload of samples, cuts and effects in the finest tradition of noise; a lot of stuff seems to be over before it's even begun. The overall effect of all this musical and linguistic excess with the constant deranged singing and screeching is that of a suffocating mediaeval hell where naked men and women hang upside down over cauldrons of boiling sulphur wreathing the bodies with poisonous fumes while winged daemons stick flaming pokers into the hapless ones' orifices - you can almost hear the screams of the damned souls who may be feeling a frisson of pleasure from their punishments; you kinda wonder whether Tom Smith, torturing himself over the music and its production, enjoyed the pain as well. I should warn you all this almighty opus runs for a solid two hours with absolutely no let-up nor any filler material between tracks, and the music gets wilder during the course of the SECOND disc with the biggest and wildest rollercoaster ride coming AFTER we have returned from our 'trip' to eighteenth century Williamsburg. (Which, judging from the frenzy behind the Potemkin facade of po-faced travelogues spaced throughout the music, is a Bedlam of wild-eyed religious nutcases who see witchcraft and whoredom in every nubile milkmaid - nay, every female young and old, human and sheep, whatever takes their fancy - and where everyone sups on ergot-infested bread and other food boiled into nutrient-free mush.) Would this be some kind of commentary on the society in which Mr Smith finds himself, in which the real lunatic asylum is the one outside the usual places where we lock up loonies?

For this recording, TLASILA are Tom Smith, Ben Wolcott and Rat Bastard; guest musicians include Velocity Hopkins, Weasel Walter and, hmm, Target Shoppers among others. Already the band is no more; Smith intends *Wigmaker* to be TLASILA's swansong and he now has a new project Ohne on the Mego label. If you have missed out on previous TLASILA releases and you can't get enough religion, sex, derangement, terror and ergot-induced psychedelia from all the horror and slasher flix, books and other material in your lives, then you must have *Wigmaker*. I understand *Wigmaker* is different from everything TLASILA have done before so regular fans who think they know everything there is to know about Tom Smith and Co would be well advised to check this out.

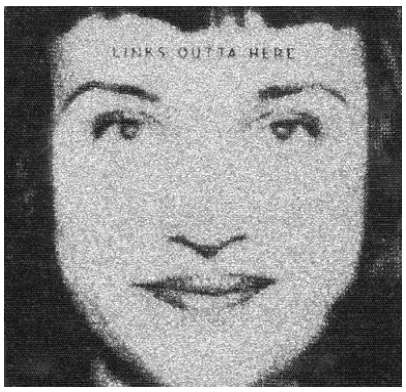
JENNIFER HOR

www.menloparkrecordings.com

Various Artists

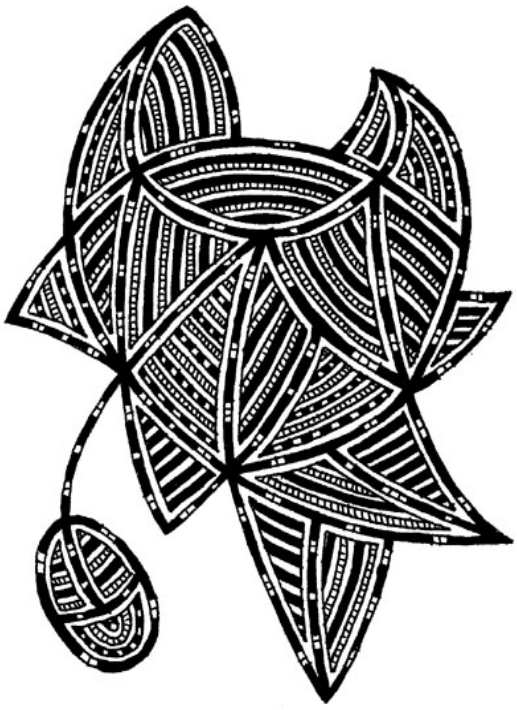
Links Outta Here: Dedicated to Abigail Lavine

USA GENERATOR SOUND ARCHIVE RRR-CD23 CD-R (ND)



A very good compilation of extreme noise and other oddities put together by Gen Ken Montgomery for his own limited-release artefact label. It's dedicated to Abigail Lavine, a woman who died in 1997 (of breast cancer I think), and known as the co-founder of *8-Track Heaven*, a website dedicated to the joys of collecting 8-track cartridges. A long list of top-rank noisesters and sound-art nutcases appear, many with exclusive contributions. Divided into four programmes, there is clearly some attempt to structure the material; broadly speaking, we get the most extreme examples of noise-art on the first half, sandwiched equally with cuts that are puzzling, strange and unusual. Around programme three we get mostly voice-based or song works, followed by field and documentary recordings. Around the middle are a couple tracks that pay tribute to Abigail's obsession with 8-track cartridges, and indeed add to Gen Ken's growing interest in the ways this defunct medium can yield exciting results - hence 'Stairway to 8-track Heaven', his extract from a longer CD, where he derived a happy accident from faulty playback of a very cheap copy of *Led Zeppelin IV*.

Among the noise-niks, we have (in no particular order) Emil Beaulieu with harsh feedback and grinding, The Haters with a dose of insanely ferocious roaring, Daniel Menche with an evil rumbling of dread, Chop Shop (ie Scott Konzelman, Abigail's boyfriend) with his cast-iron heavy pounding and rumbling, and A.M.K. - whose 'Reclosure' is a slab of nasty chaos turntable loops resembling mad wolves chasing their own tails in a prelude to cannibalism. These cuts of hefty metallic noise are for serious head-damage freaks only. Slightly more palatable are the junky constructs of Thomas Dimuzio and David Weinstein, which are engagingly offbeat. The voice works include Gordon Monahan making a recital in an echo chamber (in such ways that we can't understand a word); Blackhumour making a voice loop out of the name Abigail; Lary 7 using a found tape for a slide show and doctoring it with puzzling additions; and the absurdist poetry of Malcolm Riviera. His '8-Track Librarians in Outer Space' is hilarious - a throwaway piece of inspired nonsense.



Field recordings include a slightly dark 'Walk in the winter field' by John Hudak, a sketch with some menacing dogs just on the periphery of perception; a barely-treated slice of life from Francisco López, and the real-time antics of Abbey Lavine herself at a shooting range - which closes the CD. We've heard from her already doing a voiceover for her Tahini party, a track which emphasises the skewed 'fun' atmosphere of this increasingly deranged CD, the soundtrack for a bohemian festival of death in the midst of life. As 'downers' for the end of the party, may I suggest you unwind with the geiger-counter clicks of Carl-Michael Von Hausswolff or the imperceptible creaking and humming of Peter Duimelinks. (Both are extreme examples of mad process electronic art). Clearly, life in NYC must have been a non-stop funfest if you reckoned Abigail among your friends - maybe she was a later equivalent of madcap junkie boho film-maker, everyone's favourite Maya Deren. Limited release in nifty packaging, including a small art print by Leif Elggren (who also adds a fine track at the start). Go native.

ED PINSENT 27/12/2002

PO Box 1168, New York, NY 10028, USA
www.generatorsoundart.org

Brendan Walls

Cassia Fistula

USA IDEA RECORDS IDEA 2005 CD (2002)

Not half bad at all - three long and meaty instrumental pieces which are all very focussed and capable of sustaining a real core of strength, an abstract intensity. Little is known about the Sydney musician who recorded this three-piece suite, and even his record label concede that his work appears to have arrived out of the blue. He did it at home using basic equipment and arrived at a final mix with the help of Oren Ambarchi and Scott Horscroft - and he's also had a (limited run) seven-inch single remixed by Andrew Chalk and Cristoph Heeman, both major avant-drone merchants as members of Mirror. The first of Walls' three 'Sections' is a series of powerful bass tones that pretty much curl around your head like gigantic slugs which start tickling the inside of your skull. In a subtle way, these throbbing sucker-punches can inflict unseen damage on the listener that you won't notice at first, until your head drops off. The second 'Section' is quieter, but just as tense - long-form tones uncoiling like large yellow snakes, perhaps composed of treated feedback, assembled in a strange and eccentric whirling pattern. An op-art whirlpool that drags you to the ocean depths. The third 'Section' is even grittier, manufactured from distortion, growling, and the general greyness that results from inert random-generated noise.

Working with 'prepared and found sound objects', Walls aims for something mesmerising, a somnolent musical drug that induces trippy visions through hypnotic off-centre rhythms. He also wants to deal in near-physical 'blocks of sound', moving them around an imaginary space like pushing packing crates full of lard around a warehouse. There's a real sense of play and experimentation in that attitude, much like we find in fellow Australians Pimmon or Cray - that concern with creating abstract canvasses in the air, or in the mind. In all this is a very credible first effort - much better than average process sound-art, and with a real robust 'body' to the sounds. Through minimal means, he achieves a maximal, large-scale effect. Nice gatefold sleeve with a joint design by Tina Frank and Judith Scheikl.

ED PINSENT 16/11/2002

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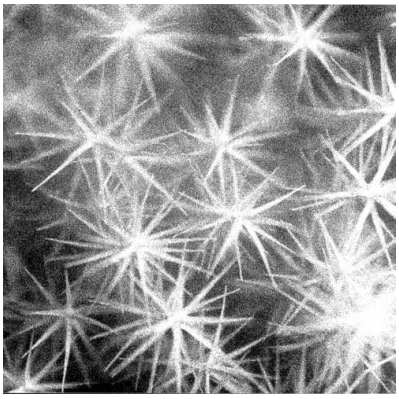
THE *DRONING* ◆◆◆ ONES

OUT OF THE STRANGE, CAME FORTH DEEPNESS



Climax Golden Twins

Lovely

USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM 15 CD (2002)

After a series of CDs which have baffled and bewildered many, where the Twins tried to cram 150 ideas into the space of each single release, here comes a record which explores one single idea and plays it into oblivion over the space of a single hour. A blissful swamp of gentle guitar music, created with heavily flanged, phased and echoed electrified instruments, but performed with gentle strums by the players in an Orpheus-like fashion. Could charm the tigers right out of the trees and is guaranteed to send the listener to dreamland. Before you take this to mean it's a thoroughly boring piece of somnolent soft-centred guitar-wankery, permit me to point out that this precisely the point; it's one in an indeterminate series of records 'designed to help the populace sleep safely'. The record's message couldn't be plainer; after artiste name, title, photography credit and three wesbite URLs, the sleeve typo states boldly 'GO TO SLEEP'. A few years old, this music was created for an art gallery installation, now scooped up and issued by Anomalous Records with a striking Rachel Jackson photo-cover. 'We are all about bliss', muses Twin Rob Millis fresh from his Asian adventure where he 'recorded many many hours of music, ambiance, people etc. It was heaven.' Although a single-minded statement and crafted with a minimum of means, *Lovely* is not an attempt at 'serious minimal music'; rather it's simply a lush, sumptuous trance record, where the very act of playing of the instruments is melted away and subsumed within the quagmire of the transcendent sound - a muffled, dreamy, chiming.

ED PINSENT 26/12/2002

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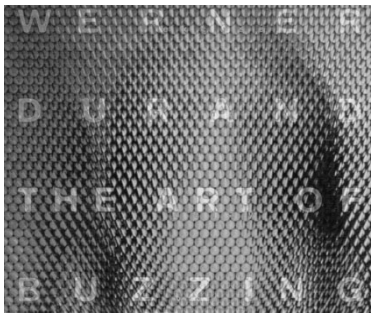


Werner Durand

The Art of Buzzing (Excuse The Delay Vol 1)

GERMANY X-TRACT X-T 2004 CD (2002)

If heavy, treacly drones are your 'bag' then pick up this 'cooking' disc immediately. In no time at all Werner Durand has earned the right to comparisons with minimalist titans such as Terry Riley and Yoshi Wada - and if you're lucky enough to have heard Yoshi's *Off The Wall* LP, an awesome bagpiping masterpiece, you'll dig where I'm coming from. Six long and loud tracks throb through the speakers and massage your head, torso and limb areas; Durand created these meister-werks using PVC-Clarinets, effectively plastic pipes used in plumbing and such like, with added sax or clarinet mouth-pieces. Each work is built up through extensive overdubbing, and by applying his 'buzzing resonators' - the very thought of it makes your lips tickle and tingle in sympathy. He's been using these buzzing resonators since the early 1990s, following his interest in the phenomenon of buzzing as it occurs in world musical culture - as the press release tell us: 'Chinese and Korean flutes, Ethiopian and Basque string instruments and also the Indian Tanpura. In some cultures, it is said that it [buzzing] brings out the soul of the sound.' Indeed, if we're talking 'world music', an Iranian Ney is used on two tracks here, once of which ('Third Monolith Close-Up') also appeared on RLW's amazing *Tulpas* collection (see TSP 7th for a review).

Despite this insistence on the buzz, these multi-layered drones are in fact very clear and undistorted, and as steady as a voyage across a calm sea. The buzziness and droneworthy theme is further illustrated by Durand's playful titles for the pieces - 'Drone and Bees', 'Beehive', 'Honey', and 'Slaughter of Drones' - and a closeup of a copper-pipe artwork on the cover is intended to resemble a honeycomb. Inside, we see beekeeper Durand sticking his head into an 'apiary'...only it's actually a sculpture-installation. It's no coincidence that the music sounds as rich and sticky as a ten-gallon drumful of honey, or thick black treacle...the listener won't easily escape from the listening armchair after an extended bout with this beast. In fine, you'll resemble a 'golden man', glistening with the sweet as you stumble about the house with your limb movements severely restricted. But, if dismayed by this prospect, always remember...'out of the strong came forth sweetness'.

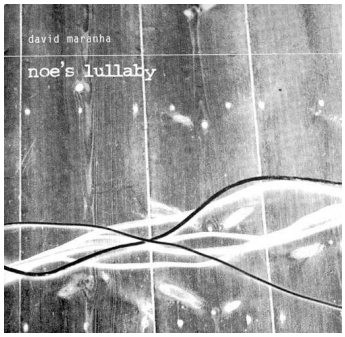
Orchestral in scale, strong as a golden mountain lion, and equipped with the cleaning power of a thousand Dysons, this great CD comes out of the 1997 Podewil festival in Berlin, via the new X-Tract label which is distributed by Edition RZ. Drones can be evil and threatening, they can be sad and lonely, they can even be spiritual and induce transcendent states. Werner Durand's drones soar like golden eagles; they are somehow very dignified and humanising, like flights to new worlds inside a friendly vehicle.

ED PINSENT 26/10/2002

www.podewil.de

Hajsch

1992
GERMANY SONIG 24CD CD (2002)



Slow, somber music that requests to be filed under 'serious'. Tones stretch, motifs repeat, concrete sounds merge. I very much enjoyed the dynamics of the more concrete sound elements. The first two parts of the Nagual trilogy are the outstanding works on this disc, but unfortunately are bracketed by some much weaker pieces. Akasa Hajsch uses sound in the manner of montage rather than composition. He is at his best when the elements he uses have a distinct personality. When musical instruments are involved he seems unable to provide sufficient instruction. They end up repeating short riffs in disappointingly lifeless loops.

ALASDAIR WILLIS

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Julius

(halb) schwarz
GERMANY X-TRACT / EDITION RZ X-T 2001/ED. RZ 4001 CD (2001)

One of the more delectable examples of moderne drone-ating resonant electrology from this Podewill-related label, fast becoming a German haven for musical outcasts. Rolf Julius concocts invigorating health-drones that are as light, crisp and spry as a vegetable stir-fry, his sonic ingredients (mostly very small sounds patched together in a mosaic tiled fishbowl) leaping about like chopped cabbage, baby carrots and mangetouts in the hot Sesame seed oil. Where some electronic drones can be thick enough for an entire team of wrestlers to swim in (or are so heavy they can envelop the listener like a pair of tight black satin slacks), the music on *(halb) schwarz* positively buoys you up in an ocean of warm, limpid jelly and propels you across the surface as swiftly as a windsurfer.

'It's all about weeds, rubbish, noise, hisses, crackles, whines', writes Frank Hilberg, likening Julius to some hippie nature-freak who is the very antithesis of a control-freak landscape gardener in the age of rococo art, tending a lawn of smooth greensward and insisting on the sort of strict symmetrical patterns you find celebrated in movie *The Draughtsman's Contract*. Instead of cutting and trimming, Julius lets nature grow wild and invites us to enjoy a sojourn in his jungly hideaway. An update on the 'let it all hang out' attitude which I applaud. In these seven works realised over several years of patient effort (the earliest was started in 1989), Julius uses treated sounds derived from acoustic instruments and an array of mechanical devices called 'interval buzzers', whatever they may be. Presumably they do something to interrupt the signal source, diverting its continuity and distorting its clarity; from this arcane practice, he creates stuttering, dense, shimmering patterns of delicate dancing particles, laced with strangulated keening notes that strain to be noticed; all floating nicely in a lightly-distressed surface of Bakelite. My favourite of them is the long track 'vier schwarze rechtecke', a two-parter epic sweep-aroonie which is 22:06 minutes of bliss in a box for you. 'Für die erde' and 'fast schwarz' are also soothing and good in the same way that honey is good for the bears, but 'seestück' misfires somewhere - the queasy sound may tend to upset the delicate flora in your stomach, and where the other pieces spin you in a beautiful time-loop and leave you there to enjoy it for a long time, this one is simply stuck in neutral. Odd how easily the balance is upset, hein? 'Musick für den blick nach oben' is something else again - a spacier work recorded in the Klanggalerie im Haus dex Rundfunks, if that means anything to you. It's a charming exploration of an acoustical space like an underground cavern alive with singing seashells. 'Tanz auf takashima isalnd I' has the most suffocated and smothered sound of all; don't listen to it when you're eating marshmallows or have a pillow over your head, or you won't notice any difference. It's the sound of 2 million sleeping crickets and a whimpering eyeball stuck in a watering can.

ED PINSENT 26/12/2002

www.podewil.de
www.edition-rz.de

David Maranha

Noe's Lullaby
ITALY ROSSBIN RS004 CD (2002)

A delight to hear another long work from this Portugese composer/musician and former member of the band Osso Exotico, who appeared in issue 8 with *Circunscrita*, released on the Namskeio label. An excellent seven piece combo of simpatico musicians play percussion, droning harmonic violins, bass, piano and guitars in along, continuous stately dronework. As previously observed, what he does comes very close to the work of the American Minimalists (particularly Tony Conrad) but other influences come into it; the cymbal playing by Luis Desirat is reminiscent of Popol Vuh records, and adds that processional grandeur, that sense of timelessness. While this 'lullaby' may have the effect of sending you to sleep through its mesmerising cross-patterns and hypnotic frequencies, it certainly won't give you sweet dreams - a shadow of ambiguity and doubt runs across the music, a mood possibly generated by the strange, menacing chord patterns which are set up. Each instrument is doing one simple thing, relentlessly, through the entire piece - like a slow-motion remake of Terry Riley's *In C*. In this way, Maranha is able to generate a tremendous variety and complexity in the music, yet it all comes from very economic means. The astonishing tensions and clashes - presumably all scored and arranged - are thus easy for listeners to discern, and savour.

ED PINSENT 03//11/2002

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Gareth Mitchell

Sections 1-6
THE NETHERLANDS ERS 12/11 LP (2002)

A very abstract record from English musician Mitchell, who also masquerades under the intriguing soubriquet Philosopher's Stone. I'll admit that the sounds he makes - which vary considerably from one section to the next - have an attractive airbrushed sheen that only skilled studio craft can deliver, but ultimately this yawnsome record bores both the slippers off my feet. The first track, for example, is a series of very inert, oscillating ringing tones that bounce from one speaker to the other in a completely pointless way. 'Great care and attention is placed on the precise locating of sound within the stereo field', is the boast of Mr Stone. Well, so what? He reminds me of some low-talent sculptor deliberating for hours as to where he should position his single block of granite in the art gallery. Mitchell fails to transcend his methodology, and does not communicate anything very much, except perhaps the exquisiteness (for him) of the recording process itself. 'No one determining mood,' is the hallmark of this over-equivocal record, 'refusing traditional emotional provocation'. Seems to me that's merely a polite way of saying he's *playing it safe*. Very dull. Better luck next time.

ED PINSENT 23/11/2002

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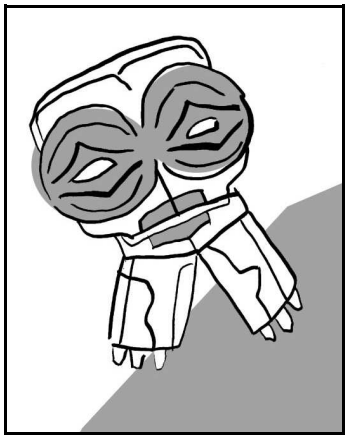
Noise-Maker's Fifes

Raw
GREECE ABSURD CDR NO. 15 / NMT CD 10 CD-R (2002)

A curious underground release from this cult combo...incorporates two very rough live cuts from a performance work called 'Inversage' captured at a Greek music festival in 2001. The first of these is an indistinct globbiness, setting up a vague whining and clatter; the overall effect is flat and shapeless, all somewhat frustrating for listeners trying to get a purchase on what these Noise-Makers are doing. The second slice isn't that much more rewarding, but it is somewhat busier.

Think of Christmas tinsel as thick as steel cables, hauling an ocean liner into harbour, while the (mostly Polish) crew yelp out off-key groans to assist them in their labour. Like the vessel in question, the track goes precisely nowhere, but does it in a fairly interesting way that ensures you remain fixed to your seat as surely as if you'd been super-glued into place. Put it this way - it's a new concept in train journeys. Each carriage is filled with a noxious green vapour that suffocates the passengers, the train doesn't leave on time, it runs backwards and buckles the ancient iron tracks as it trundles off to oblivion.

Belgian team Noise-Maker's Fifes, on this outing at least, are Stella Suitaleri, Greg Jacobs, Marc Wroblewski and group founder Geert Feytons. Feytons is a video artist who pursued this musical project for reasons known only to himself. Founded in 1990, the group are more of a visual art / installlation thang. On the strength of this showcase, I envisage them (perhaps unfairly) as four rather dour, introspective Europeans, subsisting on grey soup and stale bread. However, the quality of the meal is generally improved by their stimulating company and the precision of their observations in the table conversation.



In between the two interminable live tracks, they yield up a curious soufflé called 'Glass Vibes for Faustus', perhaps the most successful work on offer here. The working method is described as a 'direct one-go mix of random sound material which was used in the soundtrack of Cie Thor's [film?] *L'Ame Av Diable*'. In keeping with that Mephistophelean theme, it's a pretty splendid witchcraft-brew of doom. Grinding drones fall away to reveal nasty shapes hovering indistinctly in the background; they may be lurking monsters, or supernatural wraiths. This cut also has the advantage of a slightly cleaner recording, although admittedly the murk of the audience noise on the live cuts does add an interesting patina to the grinding procession. Overall an effective piece of work from these Belgian buns; fans of Organum-styled scrapery should certainly investigate.

ED PINSENT 20/10/2002

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SunnO)))

3: Flight of the Behemoth

USA SOUTHERN LORD SUNN 15 CD (2002)

Like many other ambient noise purveyors, the US duo SunnO))) aim to effect a visceral if messy reaction in their listeners: 'to massage listeners' intestines into an act of defecation' (Pitchfork Media website), no less - except SunnO))) aim to do it with heavy metal. If I may digress, it seems to me funny how few people have thought to mix heavy metal with ambient, noise or some other unstructured musical approach: in the late 1980s if you can remember that far back, the bands Napalm Death and Carcass (who shared guitarist Bill Steer) released early albums of guitar blasts; and in the early 90s, black metal bands like Dark Throne and Emperor among others incorporated ambient and soundscape elements into their music. Some of the members of the aforementioned bands also had side projects where the heavy metal element was minor compared to the more ambient or even experimental elements (think Scorn for example) and then there is Jim Plotkin; but that's all I can think of so far. Then you get bands like Boris and SunnO))) busily digging their own little niches in the doom/drone business.

The album opens with an incredible sequence suggesting a gargantuan robot pterosaur suddenly coming to life and gliding away on a deep scything riff which is repetitive and minimalist and which does not change a great deal apart from changes in key: the sheer volume and the atmosphere are what's important here. At first I wasn't greatly impressed by 'Mocking Solemnity' and 'Death Becomes You' (these are virtually identical, as if mocking the song-based approach of much heavy metal) but after a couple more hearings I was hooked: the riffing is stately and quite hypnotic and would knock most people into a trance. It didn't knock me into a trance but after years of listening to heavy stuff that must've killed off too many brain cells, I don't really qualify as a normal person - it's a wonder I'm still alive.

And if that weren't enough, we get not one but TWO remixes of SunnO))) pieces by Mr Merzbow himself who starts off by bashing a piano over a constant feedback drone before launching into a series of squalling noise including a buzzing chainsaw in search of a forest, or a pack of teenagers. The second remix is more of a synthesis of SunnO))) feedback drone and Merbovian storms: the whole thing heaves up and down like a monstrous futuristic ziggurat of steel, glass and other inorganic materials come to life with deranged elevators zooming from top to bottom ferrying human victims into a ghastly furnace that feeds the beast. Outside the complex, tornadoes of radioactive dust howl and toxic chemical rains thunder unceasingly. (Oh yes, it's the 20th anniversary of the cinema release of *Blade Runner*.) The computer that controls the building has a schizophrenic programme that grows ever more paranoid and eventually forces the building to self-cannibalise on its own networks and structures.

The final track features a relentless feedback drone and what seems like deliberately colourless and comatose drumming. The highlight is a series of subterranean fire-breathing guttural vocalisations near the end - did those SunnO))) boys get Godzilla as lead singer here? She ain't credited on the album but after that American movie remake, she has reason to lie low.

By now you'll have realised this album is big on doom and drone and is very much in the Mariana Trench of the sound frequency so if droning heavy guitar soundscapes feature on your radar screens, you should check out this album. Along the way, SunnO))) have fun playing around with heavy metal conventions and the various photos on the cd sleeve which include a goat, a romanticised Viking and a bloodhound among others are subtle and amusing references to heavy metal obsessions.

JENNIFER HOR

www.southernlord.com

Documentary and ENVIRONMENTAL ✶✶ Recordings ✶✶

FORCE THE HAND OF THE PALM TREE

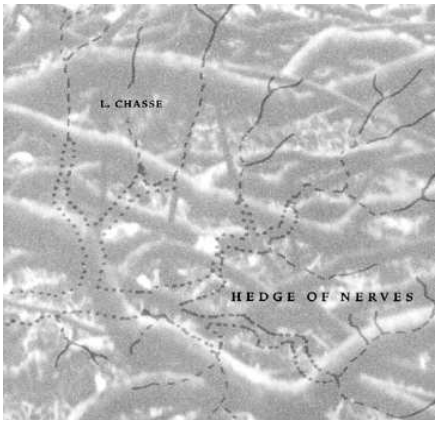
M Behrens
Integração
PORTUGAL SIRR.ECORDS SIRR 2004 CD (2001)

I think this is the first I've heard from Marc Behrens, reckoned with good reason to be a major player in the Very Special Nothing Music arena - he has two releases on the Trente Oiseaux label. This Portugese one is an austere record, to be sure. At first, comes across as a very quiet, uneventful and even somewhat disjointed affair. If these qualities are seen as stumbling blocks, they are resolved by further listens and by paying that bit more attention to what the artiste is doing.

The original source material was 'a nucleus of tree recordings made in a mountain forest close to the Italian Slovenian border', states Behrens as he rubs lovingly against the bark of his favourite pine. He shook the trees like some latterday wood-nymph, causing the trees to yield up their rustling voices with this human intervention. Having captured their sylvian utterances, the real work started for Behrens, loading his recorded samples into his computer and 'looking for coherent keys in the material.' What keys? Are they patterns found in nature, or patterns within the computer memory? Or does the computer allow him to discern patterns in natural sounds which are otherwise concealed? We wonder.

With said composition completed, Behrens proceeded to take his forest out 'on the road' in 2000-2001, exhibiting the work in live performance across seven rip-roaring rock venues in Europe. Each of these sell-out concerts is painstakingly documented, and the title of the work - *Integration* to us English-speaking dolts - was changed according to the language spoken locally at each gig. Hence, for this Portugese release (not necessarily a final version of the organic piece) it becomes *Integração*. Also for this release, he layered in certain urban recordings from earlier compositions, thus adding to the filling in this carefully constructed sound-sandwich. Barely appearing: recordings of traffic signals, bells and bees. The name change gimmick is notable - for some reason it reminds me of fugitive computer data, files saved and re-saved to different parts of the drive with new save names and new versions. This model assumes that the whole of Europe is connected to the same imaginary network, of course. The urban-nature interface is echoed in the sleeve photographs, which make a visual link between the trunks of the stately mountain forest trees, and the cables and jackplugs used by Mr Behrens in his sweaty, rocking-out live performances.

This difficult and challenging work requires some careful investigation, but once you get 'into' the groove you will be escorted on a strange and eventful trip through the forest, examining in detail all the small sounds and micro-textures which you can't normally perceive. None of the sounds are identifiable, of course. This is a computer based work and it's almost been processed to the point where all nature is burnt away. Knocking, looping, clicking and whirring - all heavy abstractions which suggest running the very fingertips of your hearing apparatus along the grain of one of these gigantic plants. Simultaneously, your brain is being fed plenty of 'free thinking space' by the vast gaps of silence and emptiness; the equivalent of breathing the mountain air in Italy, and absorbing oxygen direct from the trees. So, quiet it may be - but certainly not uneventful, and the disjointedness is resolved as you make the abstruse connections between the six tracks.



ED PINSENT 26/10/2002

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L. Chasse
Hedge of Nerves
USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM 12 CD (2001)

'Made from the sounds of 78 rpm surface noises, fire, surf and wind in Juniper and Aspen branches' - so runs the cover description of *Hedge of Nerves*, a text that perfectly encapsulates both the method and the music of this splendid record. It's good that the artist can make this simple connection between record-players and natural sounds, and indeed make comparisons between the elements of air, fire and water, apparently based on nothing more than their potential sonic similarities. In the harmonious universe of Loren Chasse, all things become one in a spiritual-physical unity.

A sub-ambient semi-musical tone in the background tends to bind the work together in a nice Brian Eno way, but this is only on one or two tracks and used extremely sparingly; for the rest, it's unfettered nature recordings all the way, layered together into devastating collages that unleash the true savage ferocity of the wind, and the fire, and the sea. Few sound artists have managed to get this close up to the material, working their way so far 'into' the fine grain of the detail. It's like being dragged through a gigantic clump of thorns, which shred you to pieces. Then suddenly you're dropped into the middle of a rain forest, that's also a forest fire - in the middle of a cloudburst. A phenomenal effect, a protean metamorphosis of nature, all achieved very seamlessly and - yes, we have to use the word - organically. Amazing textures and details which you can get lost inside, a microscopic universe to explore.

With additional poetic remarks and nature pictures in the booklet, perhaps provided by Rachel Jackson, this is almost a quintessential Anomalous release - there are not a few records on this label which indicate Eric Lanzillotta's preferences for work which is so closely allied with the environment, as indeed his own *Water Tower* recording demonstrates.

ED PINSENT 17/11/2002

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The Experience
One Amazing Day
UNITED KINGDOM V/VM TEST RECORDS NO NUMBER CD (ND)

An atypical entry in the V/VM catalogue, this rag-bag of documentary recordings was captured in 1999-2000 at the UK's Millennium Dome in Greenwich, South London. For our foreign readers, this London-based enterprise was a hallmark of the folly of Tony Blair's Britain and his stupid Government's half-baked idea of what constituted a useful cultural statement, attempting a statement about our national identity, a vision of the future, and worthwhile entertainment besides. It flopped so badly as to become a national joke for months on end. As well as wasting colossal amounts of taxpayer's money, the Dome turned out to be an artistic and cultural disaster of the first water - a kind of low-rent anti-Disneyland, packed with naff non-functioning playground rides and riddled with corporate sponsorship (ie cartloads of tacky advertising spaces displaying logos) from evil multinationals like McDonalds and Nike. Ghastly - clearly a prime target for the V/VM mob in their relentless mission to ridicule everything and unmask the true hideous face of Britain.

This CD helps explain a lot of things about the Dome to refuseniks like myself who never went near the filthy abomination. It details, in full gory stereo sound, most of the inanities and absurdities of the thing. Bland Peter Gabriel music piped over the PA, in all its pseudo-ethnic phoniness. Silly 'outer-space' rides with patronising pseudo-scientific commentary that a 2 year-old would find tedious. Bored announcers, and vacuous greeters, doubtless attired in 'wacky' garb. We also hear sounds of the stupid British public, gibbering, chattering and making dopes of themselves as they succumb unthinkingly to the blandishments of this monstrous overblown wasteland; and there are even sounds of the construction of the Dome itself, sawing and drilling, cleverly positioned at the latter half of the CD so that it becomes a deconstruction - which is what this record is. A gigantic nasty sneer, flipping the bird at the inanities of the United Kingdom as it was two years ago. Matters have not improved since.

ED PINSENT 24/11/2002

vvm@v-vm.demom.co.uk
www.brainwashed.com/vvm

Gen Ken
23rd Street New York City
USA GENERATOR SOUND ARCHIVE NO NUMBER CD-R (2002)

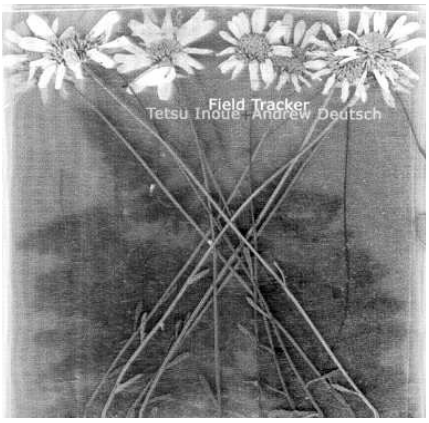
A totally 'straight' documentary recording captured in a genuine NYC apartment with the window left open. I understand that Harry Smith, the 'American Magus' and hermit who is being gradually reinstated into American culture, did something similar when he stayed with Allen Ginsberg c 1985. Ginsberg reported it like this: 'When he was with me he made several hundred hours of recordings in the house and out the window of the ambient sounds of Manhattan Island. [He] put his microphone in such a way that it sucked in all the sounds from the Brooklyn Bridge, all the way up and down from different windows, from the south and the north.'

I first played this CD at a recent low point in my miserable slave existence, when I found myself at a work-related conference in Bristol. Not a particularly horrendous town to be perhaps, but my surroundings were dismal; a 'luxury' hotel in the town centre furnished with tacky bourgeois furnishings and drapes that are, I suppose, intended to make you feel like a prince, but (for me at any rate) merely induce murderous feelings of despair and alienation, especially when combined with the cold, inhuman indifference of the clueless, brain-dead staff employed at these ghastly establishments. I felt like one trapped in Hotel California.

As I restlessly flicked channels on the colour TV, gazing sadly at the mini-bar that would immediately charge extra to your bill if you so much at looked a can of warm lager, I was resigned to passing a night of lonely gloom. At this point, I reached for my Sony Discman and inserted the present CD. Immediately my surroundings were changed, as I shut my eyes and allowed myself to be transported to an urban wonderland, where every strange noise from the New York street betokened some exciting adventure unfolding around me. After some 30 minutes, I was thoroughly relaxed and ready for sleep. Next day, I felt able to face the soul-less horrors of the grim hotel with a heart less heavy. This is but one of many possible applications, where the use of field recordings can help to improve life around you. Start gathering a collection today.

ED PINSENT 27/12/2002

PO Box 1168, New York, NY 10028, USA
www.generatorsoundart.org



Tetsu Inoue / Andrew Deutsch
Field Tracker
USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM 9 CD (2001)

Fascinating material here on this beautiful urban-field-life mixture - with the warmth of its 'fizzy' and crackling electronic sounds, *Field Tracker* immediately puts one in mind of a 'pastoral' version of Christian Fennesz - it proposes a workable form of interface between the natural world and the electronic circuitry used to realise itself. Images (by Jennifer Dworak) of pressed flowers, stalks and leaves on the artworks leave you in no doubt as to who comes out a winner. Andrew Deutsch claims to use 'Magic Animal Language' as one of his tools, perhaps speaking directly to us in this strange tongue, or

addressing the creatures in the forest as he commands them to do his bidding. Perhaps Deutsch is another ecological visionary such as Jeph Jerman, the North-Western mystic-musician and nomad, who holds fast to his 'Animist' principles - he is strongly disposed to believe that inanimate objects have souls. An ancient belief by the way, not born of Western culture, and a very credible one.

But what do we make of *Field Tracker*? This compelling brew of buzzy, whirly music was realised with treated guitars played by Tetsui Inoue, bells played by both musicians, loops and DSP - the latter I take to be an acronym for some form of processing software which I can't afford to purchase. The chattering hyper-activity and mysterious swooping gestural noise of the first long track is further leavened with bird song and other natural recordings, seamlessly blended with the jabbering sonic datafiles into a dense mix. Each bite out of this crunchy slab is like taking a chaw from the world's healthiest bar of chewy granola - fruit, nuts, bran, oats, seeds, honey and glucose all in one satisfying mouthful. Give me an energy bar that never runs out, and I may run for many a country mile. Electronic passages gibber like cyber-monkeys, and chirp like cyber-cicadas. The world is becoming a stranger place.

The guitar-playing skill of Inoue is foregrounded nicely on the pleasing third track, where he scrapes and strums for 15 minutes and throws out gorgeous primitif shapes as though he's carving his name into the side of a rock with a flint. All around him the rich verdant life of the forest joins in with a lush carbonado of massed voice, while a low electric murmur washes over everything like a heavy dew. A beautiful natural locale is suggested, healthy and pleasing to the eye, fit for the listener to dwell longtime therein.

Recorded in Canada and mixed in NYC, but very much at home on this avant Seattle-based label where it may make connections with the North-West 'mysticism' renaissance that's currently sweeping the USA like wildfire.

ED PINSENT 02/11/2002

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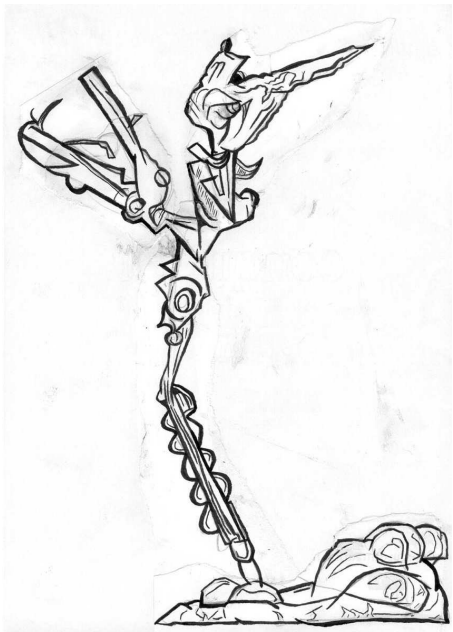
Kuwayama - Kijima

01.06.16
GERMANY TRENTE OISEAUX
TOC023 CD (2001)

Another 'traffic sound' record. Players Kuwayama Kiyoharu (cello) and Kijima Rina (violin) performed their music - live string work improvisations - and recorded it 'at the bottom of the highway at midnight'. The hum of the passing cars on site is combined with their music in an utterly compelling mixture. The sound of the cars soon becomes a pleasing effect, not noise pollution; it adds a lot to the music; or perhaps the players improvise around it. Sighs and sweeps of string glissandoes are indistinguishable from the swooshing of a passing vehicle in the distance. A very sympathetic marriage.

Apparently this is only the second time that the trente oiseaux label, in their dedication to providing a focal point for ultra-minimal sound art, have released a CD of improvised music. Of course, what probably appeals to Bernhard



Günter (and to us listeners) is what he calls the 'spatial impression' created by the cars going by. A reference point for the ears, it opens up the performance space being used to such great effect by these talented Japanese musicians. Indeed, it creates a unique aural image the likes of which I can't say I have heard before. Now, if only more classical music was recorded like this (an unlikely prospect, I'll admit), then I might take more of an interest in it; maybe the big record label that looks after Nigel Kennedy could persuade him to make a 'motorway' CD along

similar lines, or at least advise him to take his violin and go outside and play in traffic.

A gorgeous little record; something that is usually construed by a recording engineer as an undesirable noise is transformed into music. In like manner, some threatening aspects of 21st century urban living (traffic, car accidents, carbon emissions, air pollution) have their danger somehow diminished through their incorporation into this gentle work of art.

ED PINSENT 26/12/2002

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Lilith

Imagined Compositions for Water
CANADA DISQUES HUSHUSH INC
HSH13 CD (2002)

I sometimes wonder if I've heard too much of this sort of experimental environment music. This piece from veteran composer Scott Gibbons looked promising, but so far it only makes me grumble and complain...it purports to use only the 'water' as a compositional starting point, in this case recordings created in various waterways and rivers in and around North America. You might never know this unless you listened to the while thing (as he devoutly hopes you will), as it takes some time before the source recording is revealed - we get a lot of modern composer ego in the way first. Inevitably, there's a fair deal of very noticeable electronic interventions - filters, loops and echoes in abundance. On the other hand, Gibbons points out that this is all-analogue processing done with home-made electronic effects, and that he has - with a tremendous amount of self-discipline, no doubt - deliberately kept computer-editing to the absolute minimum. So that's all right, then.

On the plus side, Gibbons does provide the documentation that locates each recording in a precise geographical site, nor does he conceal the detail of the processing used. For example, on his recording of the Minnehaha waterfall in Minneapolis, 'the source recording was passed through resonant filters to isolate desired frequencies and deliver a controlled tonal effect that alternates between smooth and erratic'. He does know how to use his equipment - and he's upfront about it, so there's no attempt to deceive the listener. But what exactly IS he saying, if anything, about our environment? He may simply be out to create an enjoyable immersive experience - the entire work started as two live recordings from 1997 and 1998 music festivals, which have been combined into the grand finished product. 'This work was arranged to be actively listened to in one continuous setting,' he says, 'and I wholeheartedly encourage you to approach it with this in mind. Please do not...use the album as background ambience'. He clearly feels that he has something of value to impart. I did as instructed, yet still emerged with no sense that he had engaged with the water in any significant way. As above statement of his shows - and there are eight more of them in the sleeve notes - he's more interested in what he does to the tapes, than the surroundings where they were gathered. He's got the same problem as Aube (whom, it's claimed, he has influenced), in that he can't really connect his work with the source material he takes it from. A limited edition packed in a transparent blue CD jewel case - how literal!

ED PINSENT 10/11/2002

www.hushush.com

O+A

Box 30/70

GERMANY TOURETTE # TICK 7 CD [2002]

A great traffic sound LP - 'tuning the resonance of different cities' is the avowed aim of this low-profile project, one that's a real cut above many field recording releases. Sam Auinger and Bruce Odland have invented a mobile sound-installation, and have set it up in locations across Europe and the USA. 'They have devised a tuning system which transforms the chaotic sounds of urban spaces in the surrounding environment of each site,' is the claim. So, here we are standing by the road, and the sounds of passing cars are processed in real time into a pleasing, harmonic sound effect. This CD documents some of the results of these installations and interventions in the city scape.

And not only traffic sound, but other urban and country environmental sounds are processed in this way. The 16 tracks in the programme alternate between a traffic-based piece and a field recording of nature - including all the favourite subjects of this mode of expression, such as water, crickets, wind, and the deeper mysteries contained in 'landscape 1'. All of these are pretty gorgeous to listen to - the vividness of the high-quality recording is exciting, making you feel you're right there on the road about to be mashed into a puree by the passing camions, juggernauts and velocipedes. Then there's the thrilling chaos of 'Hive NYC', which combines a 1997 live performance (of what?) with 3 resonators, an oscillator, street sounds and 'das citychaos zum musikalischen Material'. Pretty wild, heh? But the countryside cuts will really hit home with any sensitive listener, particularly the soothing balm of the renowned 'performing' crickets recorded at their home in Sudburgund / Frankreich, or the puzzling 'F-loop' recording made at Croton River. Precisely what is happening in the latter episode I wish I could tell you - could it be a new and rediscovered aboriginal instrument? Every track has the desired effect of 'positioning the listener in a different relationship with his/her environment'. It worked for me - now whenever I step out onto the street, I feel like I'm suspended in a warm bath of liquid jelly.

This clarity of thinking and purpose by O+A may be what makes this such a successful work; the processing of sound is low-key and presented in a whole and unedited form, creating an 'on-site music' which occurs in real time, and is generated by more natural means than simply reprocessing everything in ProTools. All thanks to their mysterious box - a picture of this little black squat thing on wheels appears in the booklet but it's no help to understanding. Plus there's a conceptual approach to setting up the installations, which appear to have been pre-ordained, executed and documented with much logic, care and precision; rather than simply turning up and switching on the DAT machine, as many modern sound artists clearly find it so easy to do. Then there's the alternating structure to the 16 tracks, as indicated above, which makes playback of this gem such a satisfying experience.

Besides making these pleasing tuned drone effects, the artists propose to make a statement about architecture, the environment and social meaning. They do this by forming a 'harmonic shelter' in an urban space that was designed for a totally different purpose, so I suppose that visitors to one of their sites, who had gone simply to purchase a new pair of trainers or a mobile phone battery, would find themselves entering a new dimension of noise. Say what you will, but this kind of intervention can contribute to a real change in the minds of people. By 'freeing submerged sonic layers', the artists hope to 'reveal particular aspects of time and place'. O+A also appeared on the excellent *Format 5* compilation from 2001, reviewed last ish; described then as 'a documentary recording of cars whizzing by on the grey tarmac; siren tones, sub-level voices and long humming chords are gradually added to create a sad vision of decay, loneliness and a vague sensation of pointlessness.' That was mostly accurate, but I see the meaning of their work more clearly now, and it's certainly not pointless.

ED PINSENT 03/11/2002

www.netzradio.de/box3070

Small Cruel Party

Stain on pure glass / The Waking of the leafy pools

UNITED KINGDOM HARBINGER 008 VINYL LP IN BOX (ND)

This oddity arrives packaged in a large box normally associated with triple-LP sets, and aroused my hopes - I thought I'd be getting 6 sides of great unlistenable abstract noise, plus lots of posters, art prints and booklets...as it turns out, there's only a single LP inside, but quite a curious release it be. What the devils's going on? Are these field recordings from another planet? The 'Stain on Pure Glass' side could be a tractor ride through a huge crystalline fountain, on a world where the water is made of green mercury. We hear a constantly grinding motor noise and some indeterminate shuffling around. Surprisingly, it's quite interesting to listen to, for such a simple combination of elements. Gradually, it's filtered and rendered down into a more abstract and out-of-focus version of itself, so that by the end we don't know what we're listening to (as if we did in the first place). Nothing musical about it, of course. This side ends with someone clearing out their garden shed and spearing their neighbour with a garden fork. Nice.

'The waking of the leafy pools' depicts another ride on a vehicle, this time perhaps a milk float laden with bottles of blue water for delivery down a country lane. Meanwhile the milkman carries around a memory of the time he left the taps running back home and the whole bathtub overflowed. With the insistent and annoying rattling noise (it will drive you crackers in five minutes flat), it's kind of like a primitive, 'found' version of Gamelan music. Again, the exponential increase of intensity trick is used - so that by end of groove the noise has become an utterly unbearable industrial grind. Quite reality-sapping; a mildly hallucinogenic bad trip, which gets progressively worse.

SCP might be Key Ransone, who formed the 'project' in Japan in 1985 and is currently active in Seattle. No info in the booklet to confirm or deny this, but there are lots of nature photographs, drawings, written diary entries describing hikes and walks to remote regions in foreign climes, and bad poetry. The diary entries are full of rather banal observations about travel experiences and places; however, you can discern the underlying Zen Buddhism of SCP that informs these written statements as much as the music. 'The emphasis [is] on non-instrumental sound sources, the source itself not being readily apparent,' states a description of SCP's work. Originally a live work form 1994, 'The waking of the leafy pools' is also available as a CD-R from Generator Sound Art. 'The organic excitable sound source is formed by sounds travelling through air,' says Ransone by way of explanation, 'mainly a sustained and concentrated activity with a sonic by-product: the room becomes charged with intent, and when the sound is removed the room has changed.'

ED PINSENT 23/11/2002

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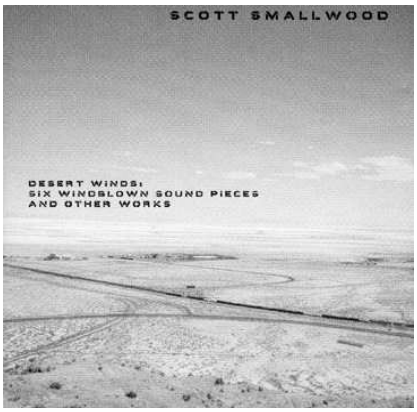
Scott Smallwood

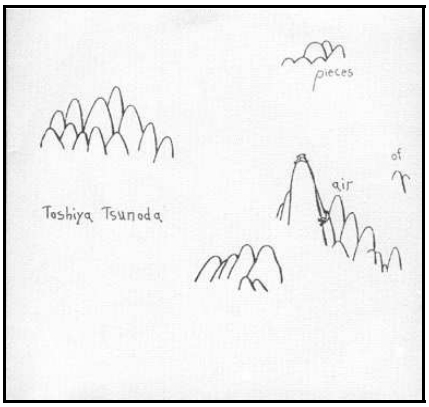
Desert Winds: Six Windblown Sound Pieces and Other Works

USA DEEP LISTENING DL 17-2002 CD CD (2002)

The 'Deep Listening' phenomenon at its deepest, and most testing - a record that takes a great deal of time to unfold, and one that won't satisfy every normal listening need in one sitting. Resulting from the actions of a man, quietly attempting to communicate with the starkness of the landscape in a very 'deep' way, the record documents the presence of the wind in space, and the wind as it meets with unusual objects in the desert. Titles such as 'Night Walk' and 'Wind Tunnels' should help you situate yourself. Wind, walking, air and space; a dog in the background (on one recording, at least); desert air, and objects creaking insistently. It's long, still and slow; take your time, Scott!

Scott Smallwood, through his peregrinations in the Utah desert, encounters odd debris in the sandy wastes and spends hours listening to it creaking in the wind. The sleeve notes tell you





much about the chosen sites; having said that, they may not be 'chosen' at all. The process seems to involve much serendipity, unlike the recordings of id battery for example, which are mysterious documents of urban magicians finding unlikely power centres in strange locations in Los Angeles. Or the work of those sound artists compiled by Geoff Dugan on his psycho-geographical CDs in NYC, which is more intellectual and connected with the derives and the philosophy of Guy Debord. Smallwood seems to be more direct - he will go outside and find what there is, and if it sounds good, he'll tape it. We're all the richer for it.

Taking on a slightly different tack is 'Rusted womb of bomber'. This is Scott's recording of the old airplane hanger which used to house the Enola Gay bomber. This light-industrial noise is worth comparing with the amazing grain silo CD, also in this issue. The 'Ruins of Clang' piece is a document of a piece of folk art, a sound sculpture built in the desert by James Harbison. I suppose this has the potential to be seen as a pessimistic CD...the reference to the Enola Gay suggests something about the end of the world, and the colour photos of the bleak desert here look like it's already happened. But of course the enterprise is suffused with great beauty. Here be your chance to explore, through sound alone, an alien landscape of staggering emptiness, and enjoy the calming influences it releases. The Deep Listening Foundation was endowed and founded by Pauline Oliveros, whose electronic and accordion work are more familiar to me than her singing and breathing in underground caverns; but there's no doubt that the underlying proposal is credible, that some form of spiritual enlightenment will result from simply shutting up and listening to nature. Trappist monks in a monastery would be sure to agree with this, so the discovery is not a new one; even so, read Dave Knott's interview for an account of his sojourn with the Deep Ones.

ED PINSENT 19/11/2002

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www.deeplistening.org

Toshiya Tsunoda

Pieces of air
SPAIN LUCKY KITCHEN 016 CD (2002)

A superb collection of environmental and related pieces from this Japanese sound-artist, dating from about 1992 to the present...few would, I suspect, have the chutzpah to attempt to record the 'air' to this degree of single-mindedness. True enough, this issue we have Scott Smallwood and his wind-based desert record, but that's mostly about the wind and its effects on odd-shaped debris. Hazard has also produced a wind-CD, called *Wind* oddly enough, based on Chris Watson's recordings, but it was a celebration of the wildness of the weather. Tsunoda exhibits little interest in the environment or the weather, and is more concerned in seeing the air as 'vibrations'. He sums it up like this - 'air spreads physical vibration into a space like a spring'. And whether he means a coiled metal spring, or a powerful flow of water, he fulfills his promise admirably.

To express his wonder at the nature of the world, Tsunoda has included a few site-specific works on this sampler along with art gallery pieces, and not a few environmental recordings of chosen countryside spaces. The first four cuts belong together as the 'Inside of a Pipe' series; the pipes interest him as 'models of closed space', and he records the changing resonances and frequencies of the air trapped inside them. The pipes are sited in an art gallery, in the city, or by the seaside bobbing in the waves. Considering what a tiny sound-universe he's investigating, the recorded results are uncanny - suggesting enormous vistas quite at odds with the claustrophobic conditions. I'm pretty unschooled in this area, which is why the world of physics always astounds me. But nature should be astounding.

The clutch of field recordings, mostly exteriors, are real high-quality hi-fidelity chunks of goodness - he uses 'micro omnidirectional mikes', which seem to suck up all the available sounds in the air like efficient vacuum cleaners, allowing the artist to open the dustbag and seek what he may. 'We may grasp vast space with every day sound,' he muses, as the crows pick the chaff from his hair. Indeed we may, Tsunoda....on 'Middle of the fields', the small reference points he captures open up a huge vista inside your listening bonce – a delirious effect. This may be a boon to the average Japanese salaryman inside his cramped apartment who dreams of open spaces - but soon we'll all be living that way. Three of his other outdoor recordings have no specific point to prove, but do sound gorgeous - especially the hill near a seashore, with the distant rumbling of the waves.

It becomes clear, the more you listen and the more you read the detailed notes, that Tsunoda is not particularly interested in delving into the environment for its own sake - only in perceivingvery specific acoustic events which the surroundings have to offer. He performs one experiment using different kiloherz inside a room, bouncing them from wall to wall (and generating a track not unlike Pan Sonic, as Frans de Waard has noted) - and he sees little difference between this, and the sound of crickets chirping outdoors. In fact, 'Above-Below', another audio signal experiment, creates a near-identical effect to the chirping ones - if we're talking strictly about frequencies. He isn't celebrating nature, as some environmental artists do; he hears those insects as a 'high frequency rectangle wave.'

The penultimate cut 'Ship passage' should be everyone's fave - it sure is one of mine. To realise it, he put two mics on the inside of a floating piece of plastic about a yard long, and set it off on the ocean like a toy boat. When you get to the end of the track you hear a fishing ship passing through a canal; for some reason, the whole thing is inexpressibly moving. Again, Tsunoda's chief interest here is in the 'great frequency and amplitude change' which these events generate. With this no-nonsense attitude, he refuses conventional aesthetic interpretation and comes across as a kind of Zen-influenced version of Disinformation. One of Lucky Kitchen's best releases yet, intensive investigations and totally 'real' in its documentary activity.

ED PINSENT 20/11/2002

www.luckykitchen.com

Various Artists

Phonography.org Volume 1
PHONOGRAPHY ORG NO NUMBER CD (ND)

One of three available volumes - and I'm missing the second - of small-run CDs devoted to field recordings. I think some of the artists - including Chris Knapp, Yannick Daulby, Jeff Carey, Marc McNulty and more - are West Coast Americans (I picked this up in Wall of Sound in Seattle) and there is an implied community in the shared website address, a site that is 'dedicated to the art of phonography...where phonographers can present themselves to a larger audience as well as developing a pool of references and resources.'

This is a highly enjoyable set of recordings, one that will comfort the ears and massage the cranium in a pleasant way. Each track proposes a gentle twittering ambience, quite unlike the full-

bodied invasive roar of Eric Lanzillotta's *Water Tower*, for example. There isn't really a single original idea here, since almost all of the sound sources here have been heard many times before on like-minded compilations; animal noises (birds and dogs, mostly), motors (transport and fridges), weather. The natural drones resulting from fridge motors or train engines have a timeless fascination, it seems; as does rainfall on a tin roof. But this doesn't invalidate the high enjoyment factor herein; you can breath air, feel rainfall, catch strange voices and travel on strange routes to unknown locales.

If you listened to the whole CD without checking the sleeve for contextual reassurance, the chances are you'd be faintly bemused by these 14 tracks, each by a different sound artist. They all share an interest in the mysteriousness of their chosen sounds, a mystery which they are happy to debunk by explaining, through very precise track titles, the source where the recording was derived. Hence, a dramatic episode of unspecified metallic clanking by Chris Delaurenti turns out to be 'Riding the 44 back to Ballard'. I'm sure this is a healthy tension - the wonder of our environment, whether natural or artificial, is celebrated through sound and simultaneously demystified by referral back to the very reality it came from.

However, I found myself thinking about where the mic was positioned - consequently about where the artist had placed themself, and where the listener was supposed to be located too. I'm thinking of something to do with the position of the narrator in a story, or the cameraman in a documentary film. This dilemma occurred to me through the slightly more voyeuristic episodes, such as 'Mic in refrigerator' by Yuko Nexus6, and 'Cleaner' by As11. Both of these contain real snapshots of domestic life. Others, such as the 'Escalator at the San Diego zoo' by Marcelo Radulovich, contain real snapshots of public life. Yet none of these artists exhibit any interest in exploring these elements, other than the fact that they produce potentially interesting sounds they can store on their DATs.

I say this simply to suggest that, like many superficial artists, they may have failed to engage with the very environment they are trying to present back to us. It may be they have simply pointed their high-powered microphones at a site of interest, and fetched back a segment of real-time recording, without any deep sense of understanding of the source it was captured from. In other words, they may be simply passing tourists taking aural polaroids.

I think it is extremely important to try and recognise what it is you are looking for in your artistic explorations. Chris Watson, for example, has not only made exceptionally high-quality environment recordings, but he has always been informed by a intuitive sense of what makes a place 'special' for him, and worthwhile documenting in the first place. This important principle seems to have bypassed our Phonography friends here. The overall effect is of a superficial recording, real 'environment-lite'. But this is a harsh criticism, perhaps.

ED PINSENT 05/10/2002

www.phonography.org

Various Artists

Star Switch On: Recordings of organised sounds

UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TONE 18 CD (2002)

A clutch of Touch 'regulars' were commissioned to make a piece of music using tracks from Chris Watson's releases *Stepping into the Dark* and *Outside the Circle of Fire*. If this information hadn't been imparted to me, I might have enjoyed *Star Switch On* more - as a set of varied and strange soundworkings. To me, it's slightly marred because I value Watson's work so highly - and I'm a goddamn purist. His two CDs of natural wildlife and field recordings have set a benchmark of quality in this area which nobody has yet bettered. His high standards are shown in the sharpness and clarity of his sound recordings, and in the contextual documentation he provides for each published work (time, place, weather conditions, and equipment used are always scrupulously logged); but also in his unique sensitivity to the environment, his near-spiritual receptiveness to the elements, both known and unknown, that contribute to our sense of 'place'.

Chris Watson agreed to this present project of course, and indeed he appears on it with two new works - but many of the above qualities that I prize have been swept away in this remix project. That off my chest, let's enjoy the music for what it is. Biosphere and Hazard turn in their usual melodic-sounding, Ambient-washed styled 'soundscapes', and both simply use Chris Watson samples as additional elements in something they would normally do anyway. They're the least useful of the tracks. Philip Jeck's turntables are reminiscent of the battle of the Somme with soldiers singing in the trenches - an enjoyable escapade, but where CW is in the midst of it all I couldn't really say. AER makes a clever and satisfying assemblage by collaging together several loops of sound until they become resonating bells. Fennesz appears to be playing tapes of CW recordings in his front room and overlaying them in simple patterns - and his work involves the least effacement of the original recordings. Mika Vanio goes to the opposite extreme, abstracting CW's work so much that only a few minimal blips remain, swimming in a deep pool of compressed noise - a real 'trip in a submarine' piece of music. In addition, there are two 'straight' works by Chris Watson - 'Cassarina' is the most eerie, with echoing voices shouting by the seaside and resonating against a cliff face. The voices run backwards and create a disconcerting time-travel feeling. And there's a 'hidden' track at the end of a wolfpack howling and baying. The uncanniness of the latter reminds one of the main 'selling point' of the original CDs - that CW had discerned a strange music in nature and was framing and presenting it AS music, instead of a straight documentary recording. I seem to recall that many writers were delighted to have mistaken the cries of seals for an undiscovered minimal-electro track, a phenomenon on which I make no comment. The point of this record continues to elude me.

ED PINSENT 10/11/2002

www.touch.demon.co.uk

Lauren Weinger

Silo

UNITED KINGDOM RER MEGACORP RER LW1 CD (2002)

An excellent and beautiful work from this American artist. It's recorded mostly on site at a grain silo, and some splendidly robust noises result - the first track alone is so strong and ear-splitting that you'll never settle for Einsturzende Neubaten again! Seven minutes of the interior of the silo, a recording of the grain elevator machinery, sounding for all the world like heavy-duty mining equipment, grinding and chugging to produce wonderful industrial music. It soon become clear however, that Weinger is aiming at more than just blasting our ears with a mighty roaring noise - she's making a 'poetic meditation on industry, the countryside and memory'. The diverse narrative sources, such as the voices of the workers discussing how the machinery works, and the recordings of Latin American music out in the streets, make a clever ironic commentary on how industrial developments can affect the community. For track four, she brings in a fiddle solo taken from an old hillbilly record in the Historical Society archives, and treats it with echo so it evokes still more haunting memories of the history and traditions of this landscape. This confirms that the work is a personal, poetic documentary film about a vanished and vanishing part of America, expressed as a cinematic sound-work. 'The microphone is very much like a camera lens,' she states, 'and these sonic images are mementoes'. It's worth comparing it with this issue's CD by Russian composer Alexei Borisov, who has concocted a similarly melancholic elegy on a disappearing world.

There is even a conceptual structure to the way the tapes are processed and assembled in her grand scheme - each track was part of a five-stage process, one that approximates the five stages of refinement that the grain is subjected to. She even feels that the finished recording is like a 'dense dark bread...or maybe a pounded tortilla'. This work is in fact but a fragment of a much larger installation project called *Picture Powderhorn*, the realisation of which involved her collaboration with other talents - a choreographer, a video director, a lighting engineer and a sound designer. A crazy circus team of aerialists were lowered on ropes down the side of the grain silos, and enormous slide and video projections were used. I'll take this over Laurie Anderson any day. Photos of this event look positively unearthly - the spellbound audience look as though they're witnessing the landing of a UFO. In my book, Weinger has earned every right to be called a modern-day Andrew Wyeth.

The suite of colour photographs - and the video clip included on this CD - all affirm that this is a genuine, all-American work of art. The images of the silo, potentially about as interesting as a brochure for a commercial property agent, become ruggedly beautiful through her art - as does the unvarnished truth of the sounds she has captured, so thoughtfully arranged into a meaningful and coherent statement. A work that is very much connected to its source, its environment, its community and its history; will Lilith, Aube and others please take note?

ED PINSENT 10/11/2002

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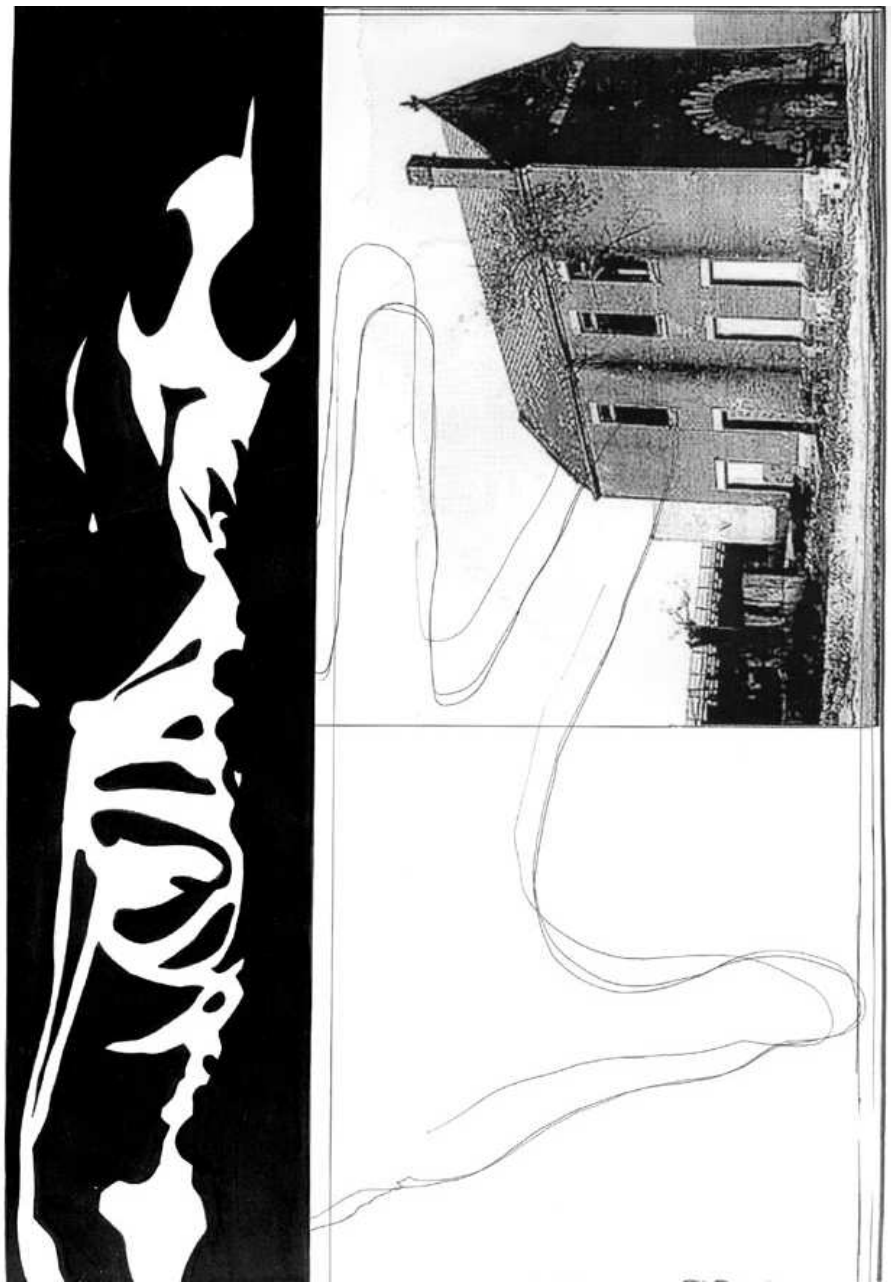
IMPR8VISED MUSIC in GROUPS or solo?

THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH OF LIBERTY



AMM

Tunes Without Measure or End
UNITED KINGDOM MATCHLESS RECORDINGS MRCD 44 CD (2001)

Free improvisation draws up a pact between performer and listener. Refusing the comforting pillars of notation and songform, the art insists that inspiration and interaction are key to the production of meaning. The performer creates music that is unique and unrepeatable; the audience must listen actively, their hearing intent on capturing each successive moment. The improvising ensemble AMM, a 2000 concert of whose is documented on *Tunes Without Measure or End*, provide a particularly fine example of this singular form of communication. Their live shows are compelling spectacles of rapturous intensity, where the players' concentration on the dynamics of their sound is matched by a deep and focused listening among the audience.

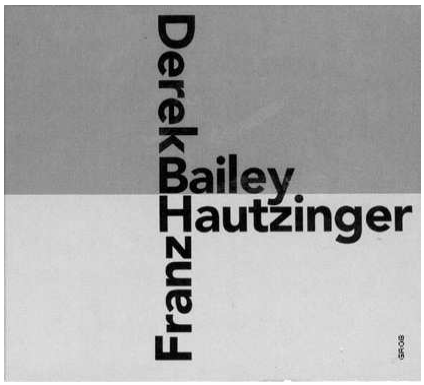
It is salutary to recall that in the years 1966-7, AMM were kindred spirits of Pink Floyd and other participants in the London psychedelic scene. *Tunes Without Measure or End* makes the connection clear: like the early Floyd, AMM were and are about exploring the furthest recesses of inner space. Their soundworld is like a constantly threatened earthquake, with the prepared guitar and electronics of Keith Rowe, the piano of John Tilbury and the drums of Eddie Prevost shifting and hovering like tectonic plates as they conduct a conversation that is as challenging as it is eloquent. Alive to the unfolding complexities of the music, the players deploy their instruments with the utmost grace and sensitivity.

Another parallel that comes to mind is with Jackson Pollock's 'drip' paintings, one of the founding texts of Abstract Expressionism. At first sight, these huge canvases seem like the random or careless work of a rank amateur; it is only on closer inspection that they are revealed as the layered, pulsating creations that they are. Similarly close attention to the music of AMM enables one to discern the sublime way in which the dark rumble of Prevost's bowed cymbals explodes into ferocious percussive attack, all the while weaving in and out of Rowe's arsenal of effects and Tilbury's unnervingly placid lyricism.

When Rowe tunes in his radio it sounds like a transmission from a lost planet, the crackling broadcast adding to the overwhelming sense of mystery and drama that emanates from this exquisite music.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.matchlessrecordings.com



Derek Bailey / Franz Hautzinger

Derek Bailey / Franz Hautzinger

GERMANY GROB 425 CD (2002)

A frankly GREAT recording - and one which all Derek Bailey collectors, and fans of good improv, will need to investigate. Eleven slow and mysterious improvised performances, with Bailey on the electric guitar and Hautzinger puffing on the trumpet, the pair of 'em resembling like two cranky old geezers shuffling around a houseful of clutter and junk, selecting what dowdy items they may to put in the front of the shop. As they pick their way among the flotsam, they jabber and blather freely...the track titles reflect the topics of their rambling conversation, such as 'Contacts', 'Weather', 'Appointment' and 'Details'...and Bailey's wry humour is in evidence, probably responsible for the title 'Krautrock'. Do I detect a tribute to the original Amon Düül collective in this picked-apart, loose-limbed arrhythmic exercise? Of course not!

One significant advance which makes this another triumphant release for GROB is that its production method does tend to undermine the 'first law' of improv recordings, which is 'Thou Shalt Not tamper with the Original Tape'. Hautzinger took possession of the three hours of tapes he made with Bailey, and over time he made several small but noteworthy interventions. It's probably thanks to his work that the finished product is more 'produced' than the average Incus LP used to be, and is highly enjoyable to listen to. Certainly we're not presented with a fragmented edit of the performances, which are clearly whole and continuous, but Hautzinger has stated that he intends to 'sabotage the typical reactive patterns and clichés of this really no longer very free music' That's fighting talk...

Maybe free music is no longer free, but Bailey is having fun - letting rip with insane chords, maniacal strums and zoooming gorts with his amplified electric guitar and (on occasion) his famous volume pedal, which he must have dusted down for the occasion and which I thought I'd never hear again. What bliss, for me. 'Electric Bailey' is my personal favourite. Not sure if it equates to 'Electric Miles', but you get the gist. On 'Weather' he opens proceedings with a blast of that approximately heavy metal sound with which he blows away polite audiences...sure do wish we could hear more of it. Amplified, Bailey is more than equipped to take on Hautzinger and wrestle with the groaning swells and grumbling extrusions exhibited by that German player; his eerie trumpet sometimes appears more electronic than acoustic, and resembles the voice of a starving hippo trapped inside a cardboard box. Need I remark how utterly intoxicating is the combination of th' two? Try smoking blue cocktail cigarettes while drinking neat Grappa with ice, and you might come close to approximating it.

Another splendid GROB release in an elegant blue and turquoise sleeve with strong typography design. Peacock feathers in my veins and a turbot in my sleeping bag. What more could a man desire?

ED PINSENT 09/11/2002

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Derek Bailey / Simon H Fell

15 August 2001

UNITED KINGDOM SOUND323 323 (1) 3" CD (2002)

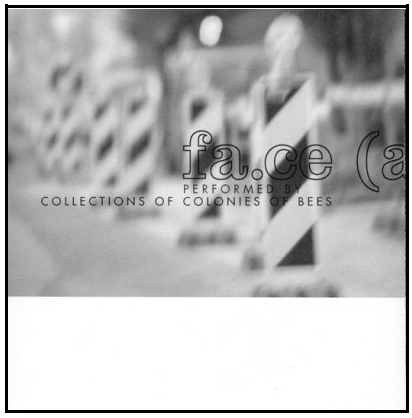
A rather splendid little CD which conveys a wealth of recorded musical language from the undisputed maestro of new guitarspeak, Derek Bailey; and he's aided in his delivery here by the estimable Simon H Fell, that composer, instrumentalist and arranger of renown, on the double bass. Recorded live in the Sound 323 record shop, we assume, though wrongly perhaps...here be two recorded dialogues, instrumental speaking in conversational mode, one proposition following another according to the astonishing free-form logic of Bailey's mind. It might be putatively possible to follow the thread of his quicksilver thought, if you only concentrate hard enough - but the world is still coming to terms with decoding it.

What is the syntax of Bailey's tongue? A set of acoustic backward-sneezing guitar chords, which lead quickly into a flurry of bent and swooping notes, then swift perambulations of fingers strolling up and down the neck like slippery insect-mice. Simon Fell joins in the exchange of views, affirming and backing up Bailey's statements with rumbling swarps, plucking the cartilage of his instrument's spine and strangling out a veritable cascade of high note spindellos, and flapping elasticated strips in the air. Then, perhaps, the brief applause of green and yellow ducks is heard as Bailey mounts his soapbox and states a forthright, political point. The debate deepens, making redundant the last thirty weeks of terrestrial television broadcasts. Ideas tumble forth and catch fire in faster and faster runs, immediate changes of cut and thrust, oblique references thrown into the melting fire.

Then, the stream of energy slows down a tad - an element of doubt enters the minds of the speakers - did we mean to say that? Bailey recaps, noting well the many ambiguities of the last five minutes, while Fell puts his head in his hand and moans and mutters, as he predicts a bad financial outcome. DB thinks to himself a while, re-gathering momentum. They both pluck, scrape and scratch their craniums in thought. New ideas emerge, tentatively forming as the business-like players actively explore other avenues. One idea grows legs. Spindly legs. They chase it, like a many-legged insect, running along the corridor, until it collapses in the next room. End of meeting. Read back the minutes...and that's only track one. The second track is also great, but my decoder's batteries have just run out. This CD delivers reassurance that this music can still mean a heckuva lot. You could quite plausibly spend your entire life trying to learn the language of Bailey from his entire recorded output; it sounds like a project that we should all be engaged in. When it's part of an exciting musical conversation like this one with Simon Fell, then you realise we all have a lot of homework to do.

ED PINSENT 17/11/2002

www.sound323.com



Collections of colonies of bees

fa.ce (a

USA CROUTON CROU014 CD (2002)

Disappointed that this isn't an archive of bee recordings. Instead guitars politely jingle-jangle whilst more abstract sounds whimsically scratch and skitter. Nothing here to unduly sting the senses, though there is a buzz of activity near the end of the CD when some of their equipment begins to misfunction.

ALASDAIR WILLIS

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www.croutonmusic.com

Cranc

All Angels

GREECE EDO E-007 CD (2000)

A fine album of free improvisation featuring three gifted string players. Rhodri Davies, on harp, is joined by his sister Angharad on violin and Nikos Veliotis on cello. This is intricate, beautifully sculpted music, shaped by the sinuous interplay between the three musicians. Although there are

fleeting passages of lyricism, the dominant mood is one of tumultuous energy.

The recording is divided into six tracks, but functions effectively as a continuous whole. The line-up is innovative; with no anchoring bass sound, the trio are free to mesh together as a cohesive unit. There is little time for individual pyrotechnics – the focus is on fierce ensemble playing, with the different string sounds resonating powerfully in the church where the session was recorded and which gives the album its name.

The range of timbres that the players extract from their instruments is startling. Deep, bowed rumbles give way to scurrying pizzicato runs. The violin sings tremulously before erupting into angry dissonance. The harp is bowed as well as plucked, and is not employed to produce the kind of celestial tinklings usually associated with the instrument. Instead it joins the violin and cello in a conversation whose freshness and animation never let up over the course of the disc.

There's a pleasing internationalism about this release. Although Rhodri Davies is a well known presence in the London free improv scene, he and his sister are both Welsh, and Veliotis is Greek, as is the record label. The excellent booklet has sleevenotes by Steve Beresford and full credits printed in English, Welsh and Greek alongside Michalis Vamvakaris' haunting artwork.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.anet.gr/edo

Chris Cutler

Solo

UNITED KINGDOM RER MEGACORP RER CC1 CD (2002)

We've been promised this for a long time - a solo electronic drum set from Chris Cutler, the UK drummer of renown with his solid credentials and history of making great oppositional music. For about 25 years he's been expanding and transforming the sound of his drum kit with electronic apparatus. He even started doing it in a small way with avant-rock group Henry Cow in the 1970s, connecting a reverb unit and a mixing desk to his drums - a setup which was carried forward into live duos with his great friend Fred Frith. When he played with Cassiber in the 1980s, he brought his drums and added contact mics, a delay pedal, a pitch shifter and another mixing desk.

By the 1990s, 'the kit has become fully electrified, with a 16-channel mixer, and an array of effects pedals'. Cutler remained steadfast and true to his ideals of playing and manipulating electronics in real time, and sensibly denied himself use of the sampler, which he saw as 'too inflexible and non-interactive'. The recordings on this collection are all recent live recordings - modest Cutler avoided doing solo drum sets for the longest time, but was eventually persuaded to succumb. Besides all the electronic equipment, there's no end of additional garbage and detritus such as sticks, brushes, screw-rods, beaters, violin bows, ping-pong balls, an egg-slicer, a fire bell and a massager - an accumulation of paraphernalia to rival the crowded desks of Adam Bohman, Voice Crack or Keith Rowe.

Strong performances and amazing sounds, and such a demonstration of real-time music-making skill that one wonders why people need to bother with keyboards or laptops when it's demonstrably possible to make far better music this way. Cutler is that rare thing, an old-fashioned craftsman who believes in attaining his effects the hard way, through skill, discipline, practice and constant inventiveness in playing. Maybe one day all electronic music will be made by drummers, and digital programmers will hang up their clogs.

ED PINSENT 02/11/2002

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Dan Burke / Kevin Drumm

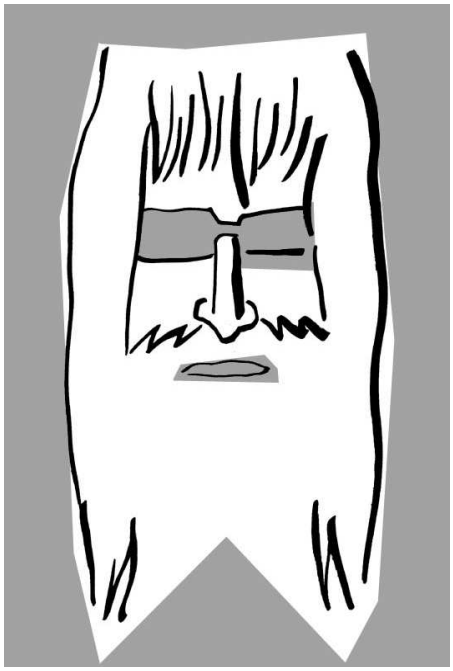
Mort aux Vaches

THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT NO NUMBER CD (2002)

Starts small. High pitches. Clattering and crumbling. Low bell tone fading in, almost imperceptibly at first. Increasing activity. More tones. The players become hectic then give up. Fade to a single undulation. A distant boom. A few crackles. Rhythmic whrrr with interloping squelch. Scrunchy salad. Packets of wafers ripped open. Dry dusty samples breaking. Tiny sounds amped up and fluttering. A broken water mains and helicopters overhead. Familiar rhythmic crackles. Close mic activity. High tone adjustments. Rolling or bumping. Click clickity. Bump cluck. Radio music blips. A low rumble. Hoover attached to a metal plate. Ringing distortion. Frequencies whine. A wooden bounce. The hiss is switched off. Soft cups interfere with clear tones. Sudden speed increase. Shuffling about. Brief spatial effects. Ruffling whilst breathing through a tube. Metal springs close to a mouth. Sockets and dials crackle discontentedly. Suitcase locks rattle. A wall alarm is disarmed. Crackle tone crackles. Hiss tone rattles. Clunk pop zzzzzzssssss. Gurgle. Breath and spittle exude whilst a high vibration settles. Plastic teeth on wheels, wobbling off the tracks. Same actions repeated. Fade interrupted. Late noise fallen behind.

Somewhere there's probably a person whose music collection consists entirely of CDs called *Mort aux Vaches* but by different people - it wouldn't be a bad way of discovering some excellent music but if you insisted on collecting every CD in the series and nothing else, it would be somewhat hit-and-miss as not all the music on the series is great. Happily this Burke / Drumm improv collaboration is a hit. The CD begins quietly with seemingly a lot of emphasis on shaping the space with tones and textures but the two players start working in rough elements, some of which are abrupt and jarring and which are virtually noise. Loud-ish sections of the music alternate with quiet passages though 'noisy' elements are as likely to appear during the quiet periods as in the loud parts. Sometimes all you can hear is Drumm stroking his guitar very gently - he might not stand up like a regular guy to do his guitar thang and like Keith Rowe he uses clips (eek!) and other objects (ouch!) on his guitar strings but his style of horizontality sounds nothing like Keith Rowe's.

The highlight of the recording occurs where a clear resonant bell-like tone rings out against a flutter of rumbles, gurgles and tapping noises, all of which chug along for quite some time. After this, the music continues more or less quietly, perhaps for a bit too long as there's not nearly



the variety heard as in the earlier half of the recording - it's hard to say when you can't see the musicians whether this part of the CD is an intended gradual resolution or there was something else they were doing or trying to do which didn't quite make it onto the recording.

Since he started the solo route in 1998, Kevin Drumm's star has gone up and up; he has performed in MIMEO and has collaborated with Lasse Marhaug and Ralf Wehowsky as well as Dan Burke, among the various projects he's been involved in. He also released a solo CD on Mego this year (2002) - that's the one with the tasteful black metal cover. I still crack up every time I see that. The man is living proof indeed if you want any that the cornfields in the American Midwest (Drumm comes from Illinois) can toss up more than third-rate variations on post-1991 Metallica.

JENNIFER HOR / ALASDAIR WILLIS

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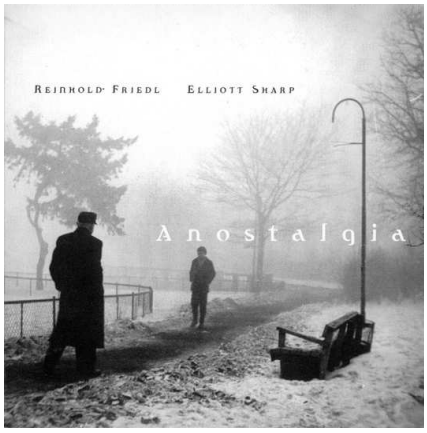
Reinhold Friedl / Elliot Sharp

aNostalgia

GERMANY GROB 428 CD (2002)

Scraped and thumped wire from electric guitar and piano interact in cascades and swirls. A saxophone squawks and chatters erratically as



objects are thrust and bounced around the piano's innards. Each track is probably selected from a larger improvisation, sounds going through varying degrees of amplification, reverb, echo and distortion, mixed live as they invent. As the album evolves their instruments dissolve into ominous sonic atmospherics, but they manage to steer clear of mere effect, allowing me to develop a natural emotional curiosity toward what is happening.

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Fuck Off Batman

Drink Up Please And Go

UNITED KINGDOM KLINKER ZOUNDZ BOOTLEG SERIES KZB0207CD CD-R (2002)

Surprisingly lively and energetic improvised music, very rough-edged, messy and splurgey - but the musical and dynamic range of this three-piece combo is so severely limited that listening soon becomes a monotonous chore. Hugh Metcalfe, using guitar, violin and gasmask, puffs out masses of electronic distortion and feedback effects that set the monkeys chattering. The bass guitar and drums - Jim LeBaigue and Darren Morris, a fairly efficient rhythm unit - tend to rein in the mess, but they also make Fuck Off Batman sound not unlike a conventional pub-rock band, existing somewhere on the mid 1970s' cusp of UK small venue-hell just before punk rock came along. I think Fuck Off Batman like to perform in a visual environment of silly home-made paintings that take the piss out of modern art; perhaps in the same way, this release takes the piss out of modern music. The sleeve, adorned with unreadable Xerox squiggles, likewise suggests that this release is fanzine-culture expressed as music. Metcalfe was a former member of The Bugger All Stars (also with LeBaigue, and Phil Wachsmann on violin) and had releases on the second-division improv label, Bead. Metcalfe also played his gasmask in Birdyak with poet Bob Cobbing, and is a veteran organiser of London gigs, and continues to run the Klinker venue in North London.

ED PINSENT 16/11/2002

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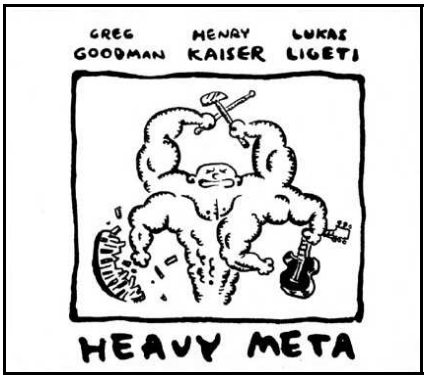
Greg Goodman / Henry Kaiser / Lukas Ligeti

Heavy Meta

USA ECSTATIC YOD RECORDS E#76/FYPC22 CD (2002)

This is an unusual trio team-up from 1996 featuring the 'polymath' talents of guitarist Henry Kaiser, and piano player Greg Goodman who -



according to sleeve note - is one of those rare under-documented musicians, although it's conceded he has made several LPs on The Beak Doctor label. (This obscure label was home to a couple of now very rare Evan Parker LPs). They're joined here by drummer Lukas Ligeti in an impressive set of eight lengthy tracks - one weighing in at 22:49 - all examples of very free, unconstipated and intelligent improvisation, and testament to the skills of these three exceptionally talented players. It's sufficiently wackoid to warrant your attention, although it has to be noted that both Kaiser and Goodman appear equally determined to show off their range; they ain't simply letting us know they have great chops (and boy, are they well-equipped in that department), but speaking volumes re the breadth and depth of the music they have heard, and studied. Kaiser's project of total absorption is not just to build an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of guitar music, but he wants to learn how to play it all too, reincarnating musicians of the past through his fingers; he's particularly clued up on imitating the guitar styles of Zoot Horn Rollo and Derek Bailey. Both 'War & Piece' and 'The Green Child' here use obvious Bailey quotations, while Goodman isn't averse to playing the same game on the piano; 'Iron King', for example, is riddled with the kind of block-power piano chords we associate with Cecil Taylor. If being charitable, one can read this activity as a kind of musical metalanguage (which, if the title is a clue, is presumably the project the musicians are engaged in); if uncharitable, it can come across as a rather pointless pastiche. However, you'd have to be deaf in both sides of the brain to miss the rapport and sparks of life that flash between these players; and indeed, as Byron Coley observes, the intelligence in the programming of the material, which 'follows a pattern of inter-relationships as structurally complex and taut as those posited in Harry Matthews' novel, *Cigarettes*'. Coley also hears Beefheart and Nancarrow connections; the speed, complexity and density of this music confirms it.

ED PINSENT 23/12/2002

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IST

Ghost Notes

UNITED KINGDOM BRUCE'S FINGERS BF 28 CD (1999)

A fine sampler collection displaying the breadth and range of Simon H Fell's considerable talents in the fields of composing, improvising and collaborating. In particular, collaborating with his

cohorts cellist Mark Wastell, and harpist Rhodri Davies, who make up the string trio IST. IST made a fine LP in 1997 called *Anagrams To Avoid*. There, as on this release, the string sounds are lovely - crisp and taut one second, ethereal and cloud-like the next. The players find an infinite variety of ways to sound their instruments - harmonics, drones, swipes, stabs and plucks, splinter attacks, ghostly wails and many other techniques, confirming they are a mini-orchestra of improv.

Four of the cuts are live improvisations by the trio made in 1997 and 1998, of which my favourites are 'Silent Stranger' for its depiction of an encounter with a phantom in a churchyard, and a long and very quiet improvisation called 'Ust, Saif Y Nos O'th Gylch'. This latter could be taken as evidence of Mark Wastell's claim to have learned the discipline of minimalism in improv before he met the Onkyo players in Japan. Three guest composers each contribute a piece for the trio; Stace Constantinou's 'Empedocles' is interesting, a composition based on mathematical structures by this Greek modernist hoping to emulate his fellow countryman, Iannis Xenakis. Davies is more than fit for the task of plucking his harp according to this rigid structure. Guto Pryderi Puw's graphic score composition, 'X-ist', disappoints me because it's largely indistinguishable from IST's improvised music; it seems the players are, however, guided by

'motifs', a strategy which improves the playing. Carl Bergstom-Nielsen also contributes a short work called 'Fire-Music', a gloomy workout whose coldness owes nothing to the Archie Shepp LP whose title it shares.

Besides the Phil Durrant guest spot (quiet violin timbres recorded in the studio, a musical tribute to fellow quiet man Morton Feldman), the other two outstanding cuts are 'Cubism' and 'Icons', both compositions by Simon H Fell. As you'll know if you saw the interview with Fell in TSP 5th, Fell takes his composition seriously, and wants to meld the fire of free jazz with the intelligence and complexity of Stockhausen. On 'Icons' he proposes a methodical exploration of jazz chords (found in an instructional book), which are accordingly played slowly and carefully by the harpist while all around him the bass and cello scrape around in the gloomiest, non-swinging, non-jazz structure you could hope for. This solemn work purports to be 'an ecstatic meditation on tonal and timbral relationships'. The 'icons' of the title refer to the chord symbols he encountered in this book, finding it ironic that these symbols are as impenetrable as algebra to most people - even other musicians.

ED PINSENT 24/12/2002

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Augst / Carl / Korn

Blank

GERMANY FREE MUSIC PRODUCTION FMP 0WN-90013 CD (2000)

Free-improvisation from Germany; jammed (can we say that about Improv musicians- do they

'jam'?) over two days in a Frankfurt studio during 1999 by three serious-looking gentlemen of whom I had not previously heard: Rudiger Carl (claviola, accordion, clarinet, keyboard) who's the senior figure (although all three are keen to stress the egalitarian principles integral to the realisation of this music); Oliver Augst (vocal, drum-machine, percussion, Korg MS-20, mixer); Christoph Korn (guitar, electronics, mouth organ and 'musical clock'). Augst and Korn make up a duo outside of this project in which they 'play chess, only the chess-board is exchanged for a mixing board and they do not move chess-pieces but faders and the check-mate is experienced as cacophony'. This strikes me as a revealingly apt metaphoric platform from which to navigate one's way around this complex, often baffling music: the pursuit of cacophony as a liberating, schismatic force to subvert and split open the cloistered angst of 'modern' consciousness (I use the quotes to denote modernity as something belonging to the early-mid twentieth century, even as it stratifies and endures alongside its mutated tributaries- senile but not without influence), a Dionysian riposte to the systematisation of experience into hierarchies of order and meaning which finds parallels everywhere in contemporary music from free jazz to gabba and all points in between, the hypothetical list is endless, in fact somebody more knowledgeable and more arsed than me could probably make a good case for cacophony being the dominant musical and cultural language in the West since, what, 1913, 'The Rite Of Spring'? Certainly since 'Blackboard Jungle'. Question is, does *Blank* (oh come on, you're not even trying guys) assist or obfuscate us in our quest for an authentic cacophony in 2003? So much noise has been made about noise, it gets kind of difficult to tell which is which, don't you think? And it's an important distinction to be able to make, one by which our notions of beauty, harmony, holism, fragmentation, belonging and justice (to name but a few sacred cows) can be enriched or cheapened.

The central idea behind this music seems to be: any free improvisation will eventually summon the spectre of 'form' to haunt the musicians; 'form' can only be embraced ironically, as a kind of send-up; hence 'they not only bring form into their music, they also liquidise it again, they do not see a quote as a quote but also as material' (from Felix Klopotek's sleevenotes). I guess this is a means by which the musicians get to display and indulge their jazz 'chops' without having to feel guilty about it. Fair enough, but why not just come out and say so? Having said that, a lot of the material on *Blank* is of the 'dig our ineptitude' school of improvisation, more post-punk than post-bop. You know, making a virtue out of not knowing what to do and probably not even liking music much. *Except*, they *do* know what they're doing. Bluff upon double-bluff. Curiously, the effect is often one of repression, which isn't what I would've expected from a journey into cacophony: they're not so much letting it all hang out as keeping it all in. The abstraction, the splutters, the woozy nausea of anaemic drones, the pit-a-pat clusters of percussion, the occasional outburst of distorted guitar- not so much angry as petulant- all bespeak a tremendous effort in maintaining an unconsciousness of the archetypal realities that lie behind the spurious mind-games that jazzers concoct (form vs. quotation; quotation vs. recontextualisation). Namely, the piledriving force of truly *loose* music, the desire of the Universe for carnal expression, the fractal nature of Now.

I don't really groove off a sense of freedom in this music- to me it sounds fussily controlled and formalised, as if an elaborate and occult ritual were being enacted to effect extremely specific results. I can't use any gardening metaphors to describe it- nor building- for little is heard to grow, bud, decay, flower, wither, enclose, exclude, there are no towers or igloos or pyramids or treehouses; nor will bodily terminology suffice, since the music is not conducive to a biological interpretation, and resists any attempt on the part of the listener to eat or be eaten by it. Why, it has no mouth! No parts at all to speak of. It's far more abstract than that; the 'voices' have little resonance or room for digestion, and cannot be said to emerge or return or bear any sort of relationship to a 'source', either in a harmonic or metaphysical sense. The model here is more one of a mathematic-algebraic process, occurring outside of Time, with the musicians fastidiously writing lab reports and maintaining a sterile environment. Maybe like a chess or poker game - both transcending activities for the left-brain in which numerical reality is ultimate Law - but without the tension that comes from sporting a functional endocrine system complete with adrenal glands, etc. No risk! Winnerless chess.

While I have no wish to impugn the integrity and commitment of these musicians, I must report to you that I personally am no closer to a cathartic experience of cacophony from having listened to this CD. Is it crap? Yes.

JONATHAN HELLIER

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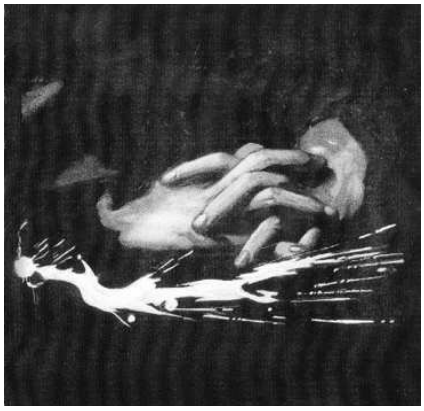
MIMEO / John Tilbury

The Hands of Caravaggio

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 021 CD (2002)

This large scale orchestra first came our way on their eponymous 1999 release *Music In Movement Electronic Orchestra* - now here's another blockbuster of modernistic group-wise playing. Keith Rowe is credited as the 'artistic director' and he created a graphic score used as



the blueprint for this Caravaggio work; but the orchestra is definitely a group effort. Rowe: 'I guess it's about the doubt-laden transition from the world of scarcity (analogue spectrum) to the one of plenty (digital spectrum). Within the orchestra these spectrums are reflected by the group primitive and the computers. MIMEO takes two features from the twentieth century into the twenty-first, improvisation and electronics.' Indeed, a formidable army of significant performers are here, many skilled in their use of electronics - from mainland Europe we have Pita Rehberg, Marcus Schmickler, Gert-Jan Prins; from the UK, Kaffe Matthews and Phil Durrant; and three electric guitarists, Keith Rowe, Kevin Drumm and Rafael Toral. Facing this gauntlet of electronic machinery is the acoustic piano player, John Tilbury - the 'quiet man' from AMM. How will he fare competing with so much potential

digital noise? He fears for his life. 'In one second you guys can eliminate me once and for all,' quoth he. Jérôme Noetinger corrects him: 'less than a second'.

In fact, the piano remains perfectly audible throughout this long, single work, its Cagean dissonances and aura of quiet menace pitched perfectly against an ocean of gradually accumulating electronic voices. Tilbury: 'In *the Hands of Caravaggio*, attempting to negotiate a musical path through the engulfing electronic sound, the piano exploits a rare hiatus, filters through tiny gaps, hairspaces; those sounds which succeed in flying the coop seek out, in and around the space , the nooks and crannies in which their unique resonances find subtle expression.' All around the piano, the competing electronic frequencies resolve themselves into distinct identities; buzzing, whirring, whooping, and smooching like a kissing couple; some moan, some creak, some whistle and some whine like dentist drills. The clarity of the recording (made by Dean Roberts, Renato Rinaldi and Marcus Schmickler who also mixed the finished work) is to thank for this; the listener is able to separate out each part of the orchestra with pinpoint accuracy. And of course, the discipline in the performances ensures that Tilbury's piano is never once 'eliminated' as he fears. I should add that he is aided by Cor Fuhler, playing the piano from the inside; 'having to play the piano in this situation, much of what you can do depends on the density, colour, volume and register of the orchestra and playing inside the piano doesn't make it any easier since all volume levels drop,' Fuhler reports. 'Also, playing the piano with 4 hands makes it even more layered; John's choices depending on where I put objects, mine depending on his foot pressing the pedals and on the register within he chooses to play the keys. Actually, I consider this to be a contemporary version of the piano duet.'

The sleeve art reproduces Caravaggio's *The Taking Of Christ*, a work which Rowe thinks is remarkable 'because of its animation of the hands and heads, almost to the point of being a cross between a series of stills from a film, and a 'caught in the act' tabloid photo taken with a flash gun.' These are qualities which MIMEO deliberately try to imitate in the music; and the detail of the hands from the painting (and other hands) reflect the contribution of Tilbury: 'His playing emulates the positions of the hands in the painting'. *The Hands of Caravaggio* never loses sight of this sense of purpose, even when the performance becomes more intense, crowded and detailed - which it does. Exciting...from the quiet stillness of the opening to an agitated full-on roar.

ED PINSENT 08/12/2002

www.erstwhilerecords.com

Andy Moor / Kaffe Matthews

Locks

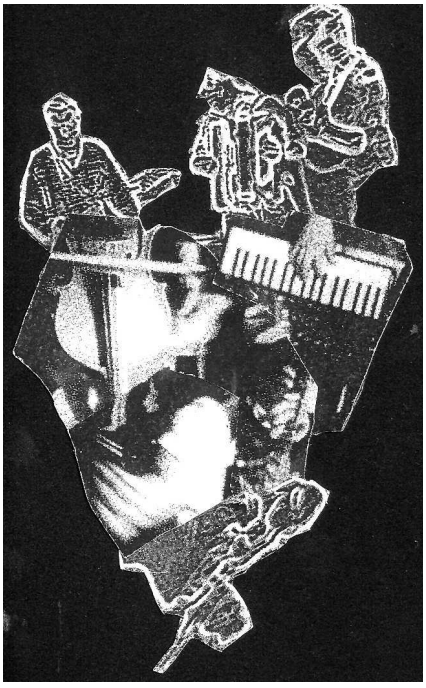
THE NETHERLANDS UNSOUNDS U02 CD (2002)

The opening track of *Locks* drops us straight into an underground tunnel and onto the back of a train which is thundering along at top speed. It's a fantastic racket which gets pretty exciting after a few minutes when tracks start to snap, ping, and coil up beneath the train... you can see the shredded remains of one piece of rail on the cover artwork (actually it's an eponymous lock of hair).

After such a thrilling start I would have been more than happy for the CD to continue in the same vein but instead we get a varied and promising collection of noise improvisations - Andy Moore and Kaffe Matthews have been performing together since 1998 and this showcases some of their live and studio pieces. Moor (who you may know from bands such as The Ex and The Dog Faced Hermans) plays alienated industrial clanging guitar in the vein of 'Confusion is Sex'-era Sonic Youth, and Kaffe Matthews, described here as 'live converter', uses a sampler to generate loops and manipulate sounds, and is particularly good at creating atmospherics by layering differently pitched pulses.

The duo come up with some inventive combinations. One great track sets up a rhythm based on the agitated mutterings of a child's toy embellished with the sound of someone hammering away on a single piano key as if they want to make a point about something. Another asks you to imagine a noise gig taking place in your local high street while workmen chisel away at the pavement. And there's one that could easily pass for an unreleased gem from *The Faust Tapes*, a gentle blues riff and a repeated pulse that together are beautiful and soothing.

Unfortunately both musicians get a bit lazy at times - Matthews opting for obvious and banal loops, as well as hackneyed sample sounds such as vinyl crackle, and Moor playing the kind of go-nowhere impressionistic guitar sketches that you'd expect from the likes of Godspeed You Black Emperor. But just when you think they've settled into a cozy groove, they surprise you - things suddenly hot up out of nowhere as the duo loosen up and throw caution to the wind. If they let rip a little more often, they could really be onto something.



HARLEY RICHARDSON

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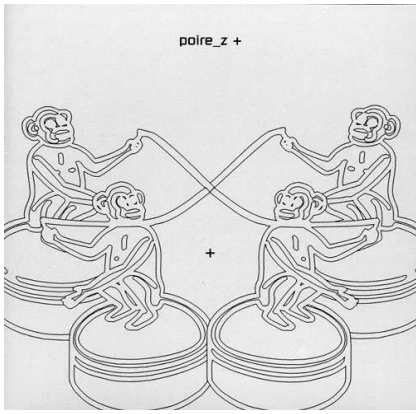
Poire_z

\+

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 022 CD (2002)

A fantastic line-up of great international players produce a marvellous batch of electro-acoustic noise-music that's so ALIVE and crackling with foundry-mode pigeon-wing energy bursts, that it



makes you want to rent a yacht and fly to the Philippines and strangle all the pirate CD players in the streets with an old black sock. And you still wouldn't feel any less agitated. Folks, right now this is simply one of the greatest records ever made. I see no reason why mandatory purchase for all listeners should not be in order...I gather the UN Security Council are voting on the issue now.

Poire_Z 's core membership is the Swiss duo Voice Crack with Swiss percussionist Günter Müller and sampler-minidisc French bod eRiKm, performing in that combination since 1998. Since 2000, additional members have been invited to join the fun - including Keith Rowe, Florian Hecker and Kevin Drumm. Poire_Z had one track on the *Mottomo Otomo* comp from Austria in 2001. Meanwhile Otomo had also played with Voice Crack and made another Erstwhile release in 2000 called *Bits, Bots and Signs* in the studio. Both were world-beating prize knockout events of saturated noise genius which left the world reeling. Or at least the 18 people who could be bothered to listen. And I'm sure you were one of them, reader.

Here the combo reflects other personnel expansions which make it cosmically better - Otomo Yoshihide on the 1st cut, Sachiko M on sampler on the 2nd, Christian Marclay on turntables on the 3rd...I mean, what more do you want? A revolver stuck down your throat? If you think an unlistenable mess of undisciplined nonsense results from the collision of so much electronica, turntabling, samplers, tabletop junk and strong personalities slugging it out in one room together, you do be erroneous in extremis...the dynamics of this rich music are absolutely splendiferous, plenty of space is here, yet each moment is packed full of gorgeous, pumping noises of all stripe. It's like being surrounded by 18 plates of lovely hot spicy food, dipping in to exotic tastes simultaneously with a

metal spoon which tastes like orange. And impossible it is to give credit to any one player - which is how it should be - it's all a modern big-band blend of genius. It's like Otomo's experience with Ground-Zero and Cathode in making large combos work like ultra-efficient factories of noise. They churn it out easy as winking. Slice after slice, this CD comes up diamonds - and that's the kind of Snickers bar that only the rich may eat. Quite a different proposition to the output of the (larger) MIMEO orchestra, though that project is great too, this enterprise is more brutaliste, more naive, fauviste, cubiste and fantastiste! An Irish stew with Japanese soya dumplings and a Chilean wine on the side.

Three long tracks, with such absurdist names as 'Cable-stitched_calypso' that inspire confidence and buy-in from the audience; and an intricate drawing by Alex Hanimann (long term friend of Voice Crack) on the cover of green monkeys interlacing each other with velvet cables as they sit on over-size bobbins. Two cuts recorded live in 2001 at a New York festival, the other from 2000 in a studio in France. This is the third full-length CD from Poire_Z. I'm anxiously looking out for the previous two. You cannot fail to love this fucking CD, whoever you may be. Now buy the goddamn thing, already.

ED PINSENT 07/11/2002

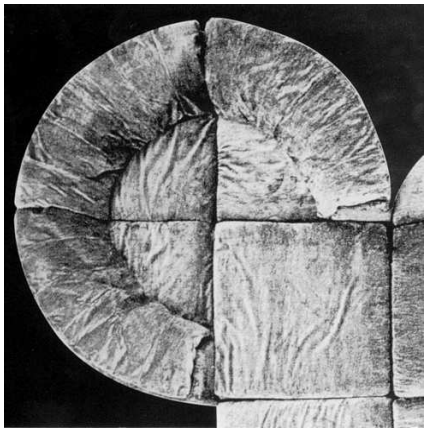
www.erstwhilerecords.com

Polwechsel / Fennesz

Wrapped Islands

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 023 CD (2002)

On which the Viennese group Polwechsel are joined by stars John Butcher from the UK and Christian Fennesz, and generally everyone has a good time. Some of the less stellar names here are familiar. Burkhard Stangl, the guitarist, made



Schnee in 2000 (also released on Erstwhile) which frankly didn't do a lot for me. Werner Dafeldecker, the bass player and guitarist, made *Eis 9* with Boris D Hegenbart in 2001, also found to be disappointing. This time however, they've all managed a fairly qualified success. 80% of this is a great essential listen. The music is slow, statuesque, and weaves together all of its disparate elements into long, slow lines, drones, and shapes. For the most part, the combined effect is extremely sweet, pleasing and most certainly non-abrasive. Yet another chapter is opened in the new book of improvised music...it doesn't always have to be painful to listen to.

There may be four things that make *Wrapped Islands* interesting and good:

1) Electric music meets acoustic music and produces a successful blend. Well, big deal! Or to put it another way, two distinct 'camps' of improvised music conjoin. Big deal again. OK, the infiltration dimension in this case amounts to UK stalwart John Butcher (who in any case signed up to the electronic treatment years ago, courtesy of his buddy Phil Durrant's live processing). But to get any of those dreary stick-in-the-muds out from the LMC ghetto is no mean achievement.

2) No sound is unfamiliar - even computer sounds and feedback sounds are toned down, not allowed into forbidden zone of 'too far-out'. Yet the overall blend, as already stated, is intoxicating. Why?

3) Great ensemble playing (that's not necessarily the answer to (2) above). Now and again I suspect they may have been treading water, but you've got four long tracks out of the total eight here where the formula is sustained successfully for lengthy spells. Nice work, team. When the combo are really on, their parliament of music amounts to a melancholy meditation on unsolved difficulties.

4) Erstwhile Records - now having won their spurs as the best label for modern improv in the world today, bar none - have dispelled any doubtful patches cast by their early releases, and have set a new standard of excellence in music.

ED PINSENT 21/10/2002

www.erstwhilerecords.com
For more by Stangl and Dafeldecker, be sure to check out SSSD's *Home* CD on Grob.

Hugo Roussel Jr / Norman D Mayer

Rock ➔ N ➔ Roll Motherfucker

FRANCE PRICILIA RECORDS P:REC 017 CD (2002)

May not exactly be rock'n'roll folks, BUT it certainly is a mo-fo...a malevolent meeting of conspiratorial minds seated in seedy lodgings, muttering darkly about radical politics, and plotting to plant explosives across the city and wipe out stupid bureaucratic civil-service thinking once and for all. More power to them!! On this short, LP-length release, you encounter an extremely narrow range of sounds which makes it tough going, but its very insistence and numbing presence has a compelling charm. I'd rather be trapped in a lift with these guys than with a team of motor-mouthed computer salesmen, that's for sure.

Using an electric guitar and a mixing board, and very little else apart from maybe several packs of vicious high-tar cigarettes in preparation for their broody, scowling session, Roussel and Mayer squeeze skulking twittering noises out from between their clenched buttocks like two constipated alligators. A constant high-pitched whine dominates most of the 35 minutes playing time, and it never really goes away - maybe they recorded it in Burma while enduring a bout of malaria, but this supposition is yet to be

confirmed. Electronic swoops and bleeps break up the delicious monotony, and noisy crackling interference from Mayer as he fiddles compulsively with his jackplug-socket interface with the impassioned fervour of any adolescent masturbator.

Ay, they may use a lot of these automatic gestures, but all the same they are at least HUMAN gestures - and nothing to do with the unthinking, programmed swill you find in many modern computer-based musics. This duo abuse technology in a healthy way; they may not exactly torture it to death, but at least they rough it up a little. You'll be left with a bloody nose and feel better for it.

ED PINSENT 26/10/2002

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Kevin Shea / Adam Sonderberg / Dan Warburton

Folktales No 3

USA CROUTON CROU015 3 x 3" CD (2002)

The tertiary installment in this continuing Crouton series, a package and theme following the same as before - each of three artistes allotted some 20 minutes on a mini-CD to express themselves, and the three resultant artefacts are packed into a mini foldout wallet. The aspiration of the Folktales project is to provide narrative forms, exploring the 'literary aspects of sound'. The guiding force of the compiler is a firm belief in 'individual stories', and the 'power of the individual experience'. How very American it all seems- but if you're expecting the musical / sonic equivalent of the eccentricity of a Melville, or the rugged adventurousness of a Hemingway, you may be a tad disappointed by these lukewarm offerings.

Dan Warburton scrapes his violin, records it and makes soundfiles out of it. The over-processed swill he serves up is thin and unappetising; it

sounds like a dull-witted bear sleeping in a cave, when I'd much rather encounter a roaring bear who's wide awake and ready to give me a crushing bear-hug. His piece livens up a little when he drops in his wonky violin edits. Adam Sonderberg carries a droning whistle-siren noise for many miles like a beacon borne aloft in a snowy forest, on a windy day. Midway through, he adds a sexy throbbing bass loop. Not bad actually - simple and effective. But then he blows it with a cringe-making choice of title - 'I just want to make sure that we have the context correct here'. Ouch! Kevin Shea's disc is mostly pretty conventional jazz drumming, with Ken Nordine-style poetry ranted at the start, like some caricature of beatnik jazz music. Smug, pointless drivel which becomes annoying very quickly.

Well, I guess the 'narrative' driver may have worked for me up to a point, as I have discerned stories of my own in the music - but the whole package still flops badly. It's just not integrated; there was not enough care put into the selection of the artists, or the editing of their work, to make it gel. Not a coherent vision, rather a very fragmented set of dull, picayune non-stories. Maybe that's the idea? To cap it all is the inserted text, three lines of ponderous adjectives to which all three musos have signed their name...when you see words like 'Interdisciplinary', 'Assimilated' and 'Ritual' together on the page, you just want to throw up. You know it's little more than a wish-list for the properties they would like their music to have, but haven't the talent to back it up. How pretentious.

ED PINSENT 09/11/2002

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SIMON H FELL REISSUES

Simon H Fell last reached us when he gave a mammoth interview to this magazine for the fifth issue. His Bruce's Fingers label has recently had a field day reissuing and remastering selected items from its back catalogue. Besides the records below, there's also a book of photographs by his wife Jo Fell called *Improvisers 1988-1998*, issued as BF 42 and it's a fine collection of arty, moody pix of improvising musicians. Billy Jenkins is represented, not by his mush, but only by his hands and the neck of his guitar; Paul Buckton by the back view of his head in a hotel mirror. Phil Wachsmann comes out looking like a Rembrandt portrait shrouded in chiaroscuro, while Mick Beck is nothing more than four banana-like fingers pressed against the keys of his sax. With a foreword by Derek Bailey, this is a nice memento and oblique keepsake of famous faces on the UK improv scene.

Coxhill / Haslam / Hession / Rutherford / Fell
Termite One
UNITED KINGDOM BRUCE'S FINGERS BF 32 CD (1999)

Very good UK improvised jazz-based music. Heroes of the scene blart it out in energetic style. 1989 recordings from the Termite Festival in Leeds. Lol Coxhill is on particularly good form. First time on CD for this BF cassette release.

Hession / Wilkinson / Fell
Bogey's
UNITED KINGDOM BRUCE'S FINGERS BF 31 CD (1999)

The great Alan Wilkinson droning and blowing it up on alto, baritone and 'wilkophone', with Simon H Fell on the double bass and Paul Hession on drums. Recorded live at Bogey's in Huddersfield in 1991; another old cassette release debuting on CD. Basically two long tracks (31 and 35 mins) with a shorter one in the middle. Mostly rather moody, but this trio were one of the best working units in the UK. A fine companion work to the timeless classic *Foom! Foom!*

Mick Beck / Stephen Grew Duo
Picture August
UNITED KINGDOM BRUCE'S FINGERS BF 34 CD (1999)

Beck plays tenor sax, bassoon and recorders, Grew plays piano on this 1999 recording made in the chapel of a Church of England Theological College in Lancaster. Not a reissue. Mick Beck describes it as 'an intense musical conversation'. And there's divil a man can say a word agin him.

Simon H Fell
Composition No 12.5: Compilation II for Improvisers, Jazz Ensemble and Electronics
UNITED KINGDOM BRUCE'S FINGERS BF 26 CD (1999)

A remastered edition of this fine 1990 work. This is one of Fell's powerful experiments in combining electronics with acoustic instruments, and composed music with improvisation in an exciting assemblage. See TSP 5th for a review. Nice to hear this work with improved sound quality. (EP)

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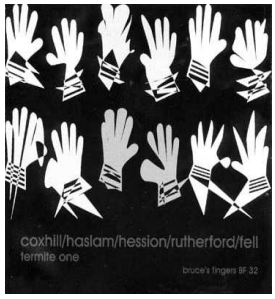
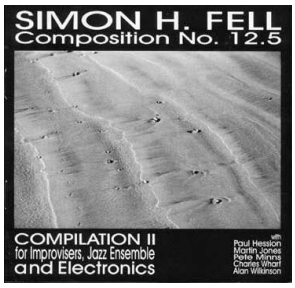
www.bf-noise.demon.co.uk



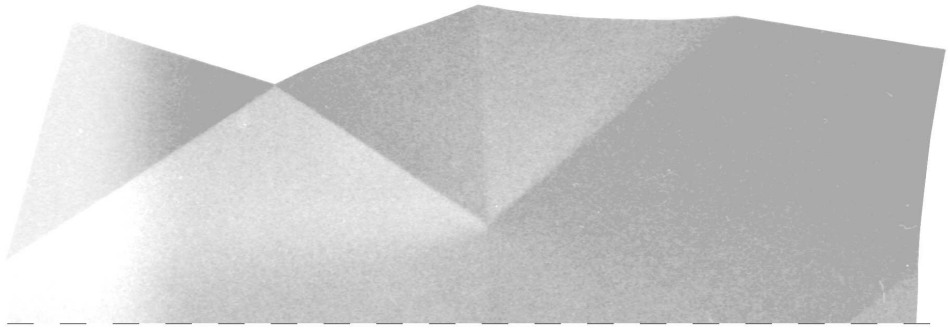


At 7pm on a cold Tokyo evening in January 2002, Taku Sugimoto met Mark Wastell at the exit to Yoyogi underground station. Taku had with him his acoustic guitar and a cello that Mark was to use for that evenings concert. They walked the short distance to Offsite, more or less just around the corner. Once inside, Mark began to change the cello strings and Taku started to arrange the recording equipment. Tetuzi Akiyama and Toshimaru Nakumara arrived shortly after and busily set about installing their instruments. Offsite is a small performance and exhibition space with a lounge area upstairs selling cd's, books, magazines and drinks. Once the musicians had soundchecked, they retired to the lounge. The audience began to arrive. Close to 9.30pm the musicians returned to the performance area, seated themselves and started to play. 'Foldings' documents that evenings concert.

akiyama nakamura sugimoto wastell

FOLDINGS

confront 12



for orders & information : info@confront.info www.confront.info

MUTATING INTO A MICROCHIP

Computers, G4s, Laptops and Mixing Desks - what great music they do make

Akamatsu / Inami / Ishigami

SPL-22001

ELECTR-OHM CD (2002)

On the inside of the front cover of *SPL-22001*, the three composers are kneeling and gazing reverently at the screens of their laptops before an altar; some of you may also want to bow down before the deity who blessed these guys with no inconsiderable imagination and skill to generate such individual styles of powerbook sound after hearing this CD. The idea of a three-way split recording is interesting; each composer gets at least 20 minutes to demonstrate his style and vision. This kind of approach should be used more. A typical Various Artists compilation may be all right for people specialising in two-minute pop song bursts but not for music that needs time to develop, and to be savoured. Sunao Inami already has at least one solo album to his credit (*Repeater*, which he released in 2001.)

Akamatsu presents a mini-album of five independent tracks with a style that is blunter than his companions, with a couple of tracks verging on noisy. The music relies on repetition a lot, which may suggest a reliance on the use of tape loops, or their laptop equivalent. At least 'halfhalt' suggests depth and atmosphere with the background voices masked by a haze of sound.

Ishigami's turn suggests a mini concept album centring on personal torment and existential angst; titles like 'Master save me from Scummy life', 'dilemma' and 'return to scumbug' are things we can all relate to. Ishigami-san, hang on in there! We too know what it is like to turn on the TV set and see programs like *The Jerry Springer Show* clog up the daytime hours while the best shows and movies are always on when we're asleep. I had to tape *The Tenant* the other night because it was on at one o'clock in the morning! Master save us from scummy exploitive talk shows and equally scummy TV programming! (And while you're at it, Master save us from Bono, dinosaur rock nostalgia tours and scummy knighted rock stars and their offspring!) The music is structurally fragile with plenty of space for crystal-clear tones and lots of clicks and blips. Bursts of noise serve to emphasise the isolationist nature of the music. At one point I thought Ishigami had lost the plot somewhere and was getting close to self-indulgence and pity but he managed to save himself and the music.

The titles of Inami's tracks suggest a lost soul trying to reconnect with the rest of humanity. Inami, who did the graphic design and probably

masterminded the whole project as well, has a subtle and delicate style, very atmospheric and with a slightly better control of the dynamics of the sound. The sound quality on this CD is perhaps too clear and resonant for what the musicians may be trying to express, and some judicious muddying and roughening up here and there might have worked wonders.

Overall this is an interesting if not always great recording which showcases three up-and-coming musicians using Powerbook G4 laptops to create three distinctive styles of laptop music. Hopefully we shall be hearing more from this trio very soon.

JENNIFER HOR

www.cavestudio.com/electr-ohm

Peter Blamey

Salted Felt

AUSTRALIA IMPERMANENT RECORDINGS 002 CD (2002)

Japan already has Mr No-Input Mixing Desk and Ms Empty Sine Wave Sampler so it's only fair and proper I think that another country has Mr Oscillator / 2 Mixers Only in the shape of Peter Blamey who offers 'Salted Felt' with just those instruments. The nine tracks on this album of minimal soundscapes are all distinct and require close listening though they are repetitive to the point of monotony - Blamey seems content to establish a rhythm and mood and leave it at that. Still, if you like static soundscapes of drones, buzzes, drizzles and clicks that you can savour at leisure for as long as the tracks last, this album should suit you. The CD improves halfway through with the best tracks being 'Sugar of Milk' featuring a drone that almost threatens to run away from Blamey and do its own quivering liquid thing (I wish it had actually) and 'Lunate' which at 7 minutes is a little too long but which hypnotically draws you into its own concentrated little universe with its low, taut drone and leaves you there. 'Folded Silt' is a pleasant surprise from the overall low key nature of the CD, being quite noisy, disruptive and busy to the point of seeming impudent. Despite what I consider to be obvious shortcomings, this is an interesting release from a new label Australian-based label which, if it concentrates on artists like Blamey who try to push the boundaries of experimental soundscape music and related sonic territories, and helps the artists to polish and develop their art and vision further, should make quite a reputation for itself and Australian experimental music generally around the world.

A small matter of interest: this CD was mastered by Julian Knowles who I understand is a Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Music at the University of Western Sydney and who has employed Oren Ambarchi as a tutor in music. Just as well - the classes would be a riot and the best attended shows in town if UWS were to employ Ambarchi as a tutor in film studies.

JENNIFER HOR

http://laudible.net/impermanent

Catch 20-22

Catch 20-22
UNITED KINGDOM RAFT 120
ONE-SIDED VINYL LP (2002)

A jolly cut-up thing, yet wildly subversive - a new breed of electronic pop, created out of a deconstruction of semi-familiar old records, perhaps Eurovision music, pop orchestras, the Geoff Love Orchestra or even Serge Gainsbourg? Tiny fragments of music are folded and looped on themselves, beat combos beating off into eternity, melodies taken apart and reassembled in robotic mirror-images of themselves. Effectively, this is simply the sound of a computer playing the constituent parts of a CD in totally random fashion; its creators, as if indifferent to the results, probably walked away one the process was set in train, and let it happen.

This one-sided artefact is pressed in clear vinyl by Raft, a subsidiary label of These Records, an organisation that may have given up all hope that modern music can 'mean' anything anymore, and are exploring a very marginal path of sarcastic art-prank releases like this one; an anonymous, obscure, one-joke oddity. Even the credits on the label deny artist identity; it starts with four lines of technical text listing the equipment and processes used to create this record, such as 'Technics SL-P202A compact disc player'...and ends with the cryptic message 'No user-serviceable parts inside. Refer servicing to qualified service personnel', as if reprinted from the side of a washing machine, which it probably was. It's a form of subtle revenge. Maybe the 'project' name, in referencing Joseph Heller's novel wants to remind us of one of the great 20th century dilemmas; *Catch-22* was one of the more famous expressions of the 'heads you lose-tails you lose' situation that many of us find ourselves in, especially anyone who is remotely associated with avant-garde and experimental music. There may be a crisis looming for artists, musicians, record labels and distributors alike; too much product chasing after too few consumers, with no guaranteed audience for all the musical activity that is going on. Maybe this record wants to raise more awareness of this situation, which many of us are conveniently ignoring.

ED PINSENT 22/11/2002

These Records, 112 Brook Drive, London SE11 4TQ, United Kingdom

DACM

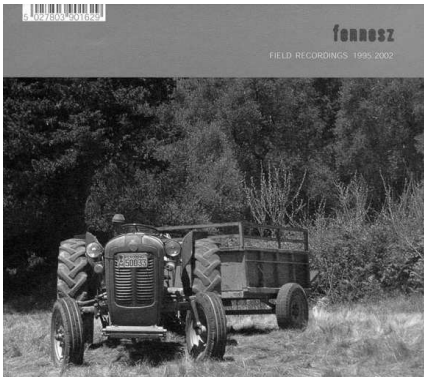
Showroomdummies
AUSTRIA MEGO 056 CD (2002)

A real fourth-division Mego release. Non-descript and shapeless electronic rag-bags, stitched together like a digital crazy quilt. DACM are an avant-garde French dance troupe, based in Grenoble. They are all credited on the sleeve, yet the actual music here may all be done by Peter Rehberg. I suppose he must see something of value in DACM's work. As to the music - it's loud, and in places quite abrasive in a way (abrasive enough to keep you awake for five minutes at least), but oddly pointless. The rhythms are lumpen, the sounds are mostly tedious and silly. Hard to believe this may be a Pita-LP manque.

DACM's input is cerebral. This might be a concept LP expressing their ideas about the empty life of a mannequin; I suppose the dancers aspire, through their movements, to express something of the interior being of a showroom dummy and its 'fallen existence' as they describe it. There are photos of women posing as mannequins all over the sleeve, though little of the hoped-for complexity of the theme is expressed. One listen, and you'll probably feel like the only dummy here is you - for buying this tripe.

ED PINSENT 09/11/2002

www.mego.at

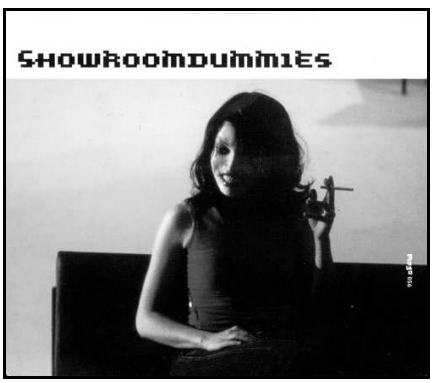


Fennesz

Field Recordings 1995-2002
UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TONE
16 CD (2002)

A very useful and desirable comp of diverse cuts by the Fennery fellow, some of which are hard to come by - covering a five year period (astonishing to think he's been around that long, eh?) this includes the *Instrument* EP in its totality, plus Christian's contributions to other compilations, film soundtracks, along with remixes and what are laughingly called 'special projects', plus an unreleased cut from the vaults called 'Good Man'. This is a long-overdue goodie and a real treat for fans.

Despite the title of course there are no 'field recordings' by way of environmental documents made in the middle of a countryside meadow, but the conceit reminds us that although all flesh is as grass, Fennesz's work has not aged and still comes up smelling as fresh as a bale of new-mown hay. Jon Wozencroft's cover images of a tractor, wooden fence and field of crops does nothing to contradict this notion. After the exceptionally powerful opener 'Good Man', we have all four tracks from *Instrument*, a belter of a disc which I think was Fennesz's first record and one of the earliest MEGO 12" releases. Wow. It exhibits CF's sharp genius right upfront - everything we have since associated with him seems to have been in place from the start. Here it is in the raw, wild buzzsaw drones and crazy distorted guitar noise - only back then he used a fairly conventional drum track, an element which has since been ditched in favour of his far more unrestrained approach, free-flowing fields of arrhythmic free noise.



Well, so much for the first five cuts. The rest of the comp can seem a bit disparate and throwaway after that strong opening. 'Betrieb' is a remix version by Ekkehard Ehlers for a Mille Plateaux release of that name, and Ehlers performs a small miracle by softening the overall range of frequencies and making Fennesz sound positively romantic. Maybe not a major miracle; there's always been this altruistic side to CF (the nice guy out of the meanie Mego gang) and Ehlers somehow cultivates it electronically. Both 'Stairs' and 'Odessa' are soundtracks plucked from a movie called *Blue Moon*, the former a short episode with a glutinous, cloying atmosphere, the latter a subterranean exploration suggesting pearl divers in the ocean. 'Codeine' finds acoustic guitar joining the laptoppery confections - very pleasing effect indeed - mingling with that powerful distressed surface which CF has made all his own, like musical notes being blown away in a strong wind. 'Ivend00' is punchier, with a controlled explosion of nasty static splinters and other micro-blip events, all combined in the mosaic style, instead of with the usual broad well-charged electronic paintbrush.

For some reason this is one of the strongest Fennesz sets ever released - maybe he works best with short, single tracks, where he can pour everything he's got into one intense burst of layered energy. Live recordings, and the much vaunted *Endless Summer* are great things in their way, but even they can seem slightly dissipated and washed-out in comparison to this. Hear Fennesz at his muscular best on *Field Recordings*!

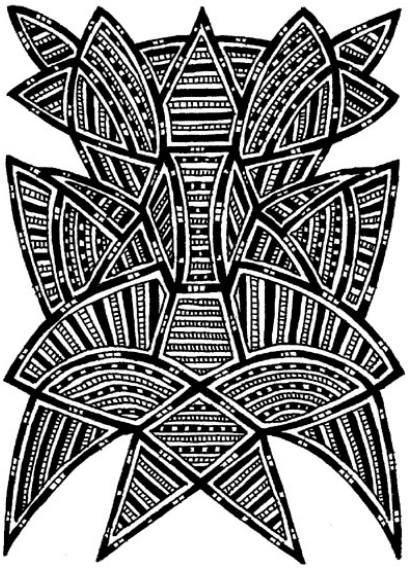
ED PINSENT 25/11/2002

www.touch.demon.co.uk

Mattin / Rosy Parlane

Mendietan
W.M.O/R NO NUMBER CD (2002)

Just the other day I stumbled across some photos on the Internet of Mattin and Rosy Parlane sitting on stage playing music on their laptops in an English pub ('12 Bar Club' I think it's called - check the website www.members.lycos.co.uk/richardanderson/newpage6.html) while Eddie Prevost sat beside them on percussion duties. *Mendietan* on the other hand sees the boys armed with laptops, a digital camera, microphones and headphones hiking and camping in the mountainous Basque country in northern Spain, their 'aim' being to record their responses to the environment via improvisation and to interact with their surroundings via the same media and techniques. The parameters of the project I think were deliberately vague as they'd have to be if music improvisation



represents the pair's responses and this means that you the listener have to participate actively in the listening process to make any sense of the whole project which involved visual and literary aspects as well, and to decide whether *Mendietan* is an environmental sound recording, with all that is implied in the term, or if it does not qualify at all as such since the duo's response to their environment is heavily mediated by the technology they used. Heck, but some of Francisco López's environmental sound recordings turn out to be manipulated according to that artist's worldview or ideology if you like, more so than *Mendietan* in a way, and we accept López's work as legit environmental sound recordings (at least at TSP we do).

The music itself can be surprisingly atmospheric, particularly on Track 5 where it's like a constant stream of electrically charged ions such as might occur during a build-up of air pressure before a thunderstorm (correct me if this is wrong; I'm not a meteorologist), punctuated by sharp crackles of energy that might be zipping from one cloud to the next. Parts of this CD remind me of Disinformation's research into electromagnetic or geomagnetic activity as a sound source. Then you get other tracks where blasts of noise that'd do a Nipponese noiseician proud are interspersed with periods of glacial silence, like Merzbow meeting Lasse Marhaug's *Nothing but sound from now on* recording or Norwegian black metal at its iciest and most ambient; or you get Track 7 which features atomised streams of particles crackling like embers of the campfire late at night (like that track on Whitehouse's *Mummy and Daddy* CD where William Bennett talks normally for once) or insects rejoicing when the sun goes down. Don't expect the music to 'capture' any particular flavour or romance of the Basque country, though if the music moves you emotionally, that's great. (I am very wary of people who expect music, especially environmental music, to bowl them over like a bowling ball hitting skittles. Don't these people already have a life?) Some of the tracks are very dynamic and loud, almost brash, and others are subtle or tranquil. You are welcome to impose your own interpretation of what *Mendietan* might be about or you may even ignore the context in which it was recorded (that is, forget it has anything to do with Euskal-Herria though if you have Basque friends they might not appreciate that!) and treat the music as an independent entity in itself.

While you are thinking about what I have just said, I note that *Mendietan* is a self-released recording though if Mattin had sought a more conventional way of releasing it, he might have found Ash International, Francisco Lopez's own label or even Mego (if they ever get over their gabba tendencies) to be his best bets; yes, it's that kind of recording. If you are keen on any of the labels or artists I mentioned above, get out or get down and buy this CD and let's all send Mattin and Rosy Parlane on another camping trip. If we get enough buyers for *Mendietan* maybe there'll be enough cash to send the fellas to Majorca or Barcelona for a different kind of hiking and camping trip and a different environmental sound project ...hmm.

JENNIFER HOR

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www.mattin.org

pxp

while (p) {print'.',' 'x$p++}
RUSSIA WAVETRAP WAV04 CD (2002)

Starts out noisy, loud and harsh like a small child screaming its independence from mum but then settles into a mostly agreeable yet still busy electroacoustic set. Correct me if I'm wrong but I think the guy involved with this recording has a connection with Farmers Manual or General Magic and though I know neither of these two acts' music, from reading previous TSP reviews on their recordings, I see our friend pxp here engages in similar games as FM and GM do such as having CD sleeves spilling over with berserk typography, using a musical approach that is half-serious, half-playful and packing every moment of the 70+ minute recording here with skewed and kooky beats, rhythms and textures plus some amazingly clear and resonant pieces. The noisy stuff is dispensed with pretty quickly and pxp moves into near-dance territory on tracks 2 - 5; after these, you need to turn the volume level way, way up to keep up with this guy. Around tracks 6 - 8, pxp develops an interest in sonorous bell-like tones but just when

he appears to have exhausted the game plan and you think he's heading into a Grey Zone of Boredom ... the music flitters off in a different direction. pxp is at his quietest on tracks 14 and 17 and at his most microscopic / pointillist on track 16. Indeed track 17 is a piece of spacious interstellar ambience millions of light years removed from track 1, yet though it becomes obvious that pxp has moved you deliberately from A to B all the way to Z in his mapping of the known (and sometimes unknown) sonic territory, you don't feel you've been pushed or manipulated all the way - it all feels completely natural that pxp has put you where he has despite all the seemingly random paths he's taken.

Having covered so much territory in the way he has done, pxp is sure to find it difficult to top this recording unless he intends only to be a one-hit wonder or still has some rabbits in his laptop. Sometimes though, it's better to sparkle brilliantly and briefly in the firmament and leave everyone to talk about you for a long time afterwards than to hang about Rolling Stones-like long after your use-by date. You only have to see the number of mouldy old zombie rock acts still stumbling about, not to mention the alarming number of bands crawling out of the graveyard for nostalgia tours, to realise we're living in a real-life horror movie more monstrous than anything John Carpenter or David Cronenberg ever directed.

JENNIFER HOR

http://wt.post-pop.org

Matt Shoemaker
Groundless
GERMANY TRENTE OISEAUX TOC 004 CD (ND)

Matt Shoemaker
Warung Elusion
GERMANY TRENTE OISEAUX TOC 022 CD (2002)

Here be both solo releases from this American traveller and film-history buff. *Groundless* is an accomplished slice of minimal computer-composition. Of the two this is slightly more 'busy' than *Warung Elusion*, but it does display the same concern to create small moments of drama out of tiny crescendoes; he inflates each sound event like a tiny balloon and stops just before it explodes in his face. He rubs textures together until a tiny flame breaks out, which is promptly extinguished as quickly as blowing out a match. Shoemaker starts off with field recordings and feeds them to his computer, like a botanist feeding insects to a Venus fly-trap. He bleaches each recorded segment dry, like making faded photographs - or rather washed-out 8mm film. As listener-viewers of this imaginary movie, we 'see' more clear celluloid than exposed nitrate, yet still an image persists in the mind. Barely a single recognisable entity will appear out of this sonic mist, but clearly this work remains based on some form of contact with reality, and is not a wholly imaginary digital episode trapped in the hard drive. That's about as enjoyable as abstract music gets these days, folks.

Shomemaker is something of a connoisseur of European Art Cinema (such as Jean-Luc Godard) and forgotten English classic films (such as *Doctor in Trouble* with Leslie Phillips), besides remaining active as a traveller to the East and collector of unusual Asian and Pacific musics. If I wanted to make a comparison between the cinematic experience and this music...oh, forget it. Let's face it, I would be straining the truth to state that there's any low-key 'narrative' clearly discernible in this CD - but at least he maintains a steady flow of aural information, unlike López or Günter who are known to chop the CD length into sections, and sandwich it together with long silent sections (the equivalent of using black leader in films). Shoemaker allows his layers to build and run for a very long time, subtly shifting the focus and direction. Quite tense and effective listening, overall; and it even heightens the senses (not just hearing) acutely, with its plentiful abundance of high tones and discreet rustling.

Warung Elusion is a more recent one which attempts to up the ante on his first, by reducing everything even further as it's rendered down in the stewing bucket of minimalism like so much animal fat. It starts in the barely-audible range and very cleverly drifts into something you can perceive, like a faint breeze of sound. Without noticing it, you suddenly find yourself in a thicket of layered noise. When the music finally engages with its chosen destination, it's a dense whirr, 20% of whose constituent parts sound as though they should be familiar. But they are not. This clever disorientation trick is what makes Matt Shoemaker tolerable, at least - because his work can at times seem somewhat arid and empty for its own sake. This CD present an experience akin to visiting an unfamiliar city with a black bag tied over your head.

At best, though, this stuff seriously disrupts your perception of time. Shoemaker takes all the time in the world to let his micro mini-dramas unreel, like bizarre Lepidoptera unfolding their translucent wings as they emerge from the pupa. Since the sound is always continuous (unlike his mentor Günter, Shoemaker doesn't believe in turning the sound on and off like a faucet) adds to the illusion that this work is all of apiece (in fact it's constructed from several patiently-edited layers). A trip into space ensues; sealed into your magic flying chair, your body remains totally motionless at the centre of gravity, while all around you the entire universe rolls by like clouds of sub-atomic particles which appear to be as large as hailstones.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2002 + 09/12/2002

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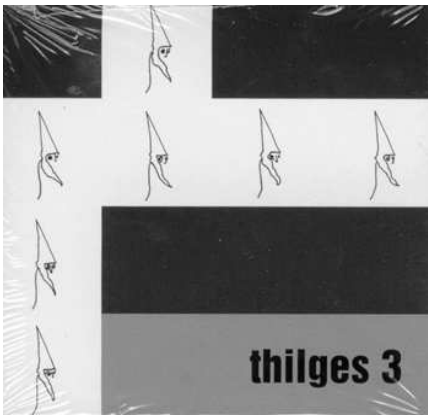
Matt Shoemaker is interviewed this issue.



Snawklor
Rushes
AUSTRALIA MARSUPIAL SOUNDS MS001 CD(2002)

A pleasant and sparkling debut (I think) from the Melbourne-based duo of Dylan Krasevac and Nathan Gray. Although the overall sound can be a bit thin and the Snawkers spend most if not nearly all their time in the Ethereal Zone of the available sound range on their PCs and samplers, the music is well constructed and lively, and each of the seven tracks on *Rushes* has its own distinct personality. 'Magnetic Strip' is a noisy piece (I guess every electronic music album has to have its noisy piece these days) and 'Hester' has a very agreeable spacey ambience courtesy of some very resonant metal percussion samples. 'Odonata FM' is another track that sticks in the mind for its series of sounds suggesting something about to take off into the stratosphere and then changes its mind - constantly. The cutesy-kitschy 'Asia Specific' may appeal to some but it didn't to me - the whooping voices from some chopsocky Hong Kong film were too much in the background and there weren't enough of them to give the track some needed down-to-earth oomph to counter-balance the more cloying Oriental-sounding elements. Otherwise, Snawklor are adept at painting sonic pictures that evoke some very enjoyable images and associations, and leaving them at that; yes, that means an album of static music but just as over-drawing or over-painting can ruin a picture, so over-burdening a piece of music can choke the life out of it and you don't want to do that even on a debut album when there's that temptation to impress everyone with what you know and what you can do.

JENNIFER HOR

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Thilges 3
Neurotitan
AUSTRIA THILGES TH307 3" CD (2002)

Austrian minimalism, oh look, Daddy! Look! There's nothing happening! No-one is moving! Is this what you said stasis would be like? Can we come back tomorrow for more? I can't wait to tell all my friends and make them jealous. Daddy isn't it brilliant the way if you stare unblinkingly at it for long enough you start fixating on minute particles of dust suspended in rays of frigid sunlight? Just to stop the mind collapsing into samadhi? And the way the shadows thrown by the formless colourless objects move ever-so-slightly as the day progresses and the sun moves across the sky that we're not supposed to notice? Dad? Are you still there? Were you ever there? Oh Daddy I'm lost...

Yeah, this is definitely a case of 'check your identity at the door'- only the merest sliver of undifferentiated consciousness is permitted to enter the defiantly godless vacuum that is *Neurotitan*: no anthropomorphic figures here, please, nor any sentimental humanist humbug. The barest suggestion of opacity stops this piece from attaining the minimalist grail of not actually being there at all. Which is fine, you know; it's good to have an anti-Romantic tradition of music available to us, both to offset and act as antidote to some of the more morbid and trivial self-obsessions that have strangled our folk-art since, ooh, Dylan went electric/ Geldof and Ure fed the world/ you started hanging around (take your pick!). But dangle-my-baby-over-a-hotel-balcony-in-Berlin, it's very boring- and no, I'm not expecting to be crassly 'entertained' as if I were listening to Schoenberg or Ibiza club classics, and I'm quite *au courant* with the idea of aural-neural bioelectric sculpture thank you very much. Insist, if you will, that it's all about 'acoustic introduction of public places, museums, galleries, theatres and clubs to social, transformation-triggering visual sound-innovations' (or so they say)- I'm all for it, and maybe this would work better for me if I'd experienced it in the context it was designed for. But as a home-listening experience, I found it sullen and queerly ersatz, as if the real analogue-synth action was happening elsewhere (apparently *Neurotitan* was made using only Moog and other archaic technology).

Can't honestly recommend this, unless for use as a sample-source for any boring electronic doodles of your own you might have on the go.

JONATHAN HELLIER

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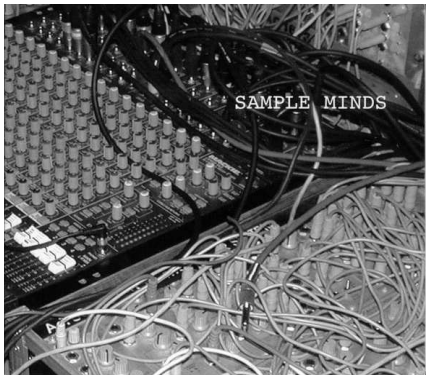


Various Artists

Sample Minds

GERMANY MEDIENKUNST TIROL MKT-2001-02/03 2 X CD (2002)

A deeply alien object this: I donned my rubber gloves before handling it, suspecting it might be coated in translucent space-goo (you know, the kind of translucent space-goo that's harmful to earth mammals), put out the cat, covered the children's mouths with bandages soaked in nitrous oxide, built a pyramid on the roof of my house and spent an afternoon reciting extracts from my extensive collection of Babylonian and Sumerian after-dinner witticisms, just to try and lighten the mood. What am I trying to tell you? Three things:

(1) This music- indeed the whole package and everything it implies- is profoundly foreign to me.

(2) Having listened to it, I am happy for it to remain so.

(3) These recordings offer me nothing. As to whether there's anything in them for you, well that's something we'll try and get a clearer look at.

What we have here is a 2 x CD set of 'audio contributions on sampling culture from musicians, artists and writers', issued 'on the occasion of a series of exhibitions….in the Projektraum at the Kunstraum Innsbruck, entitled 'copy&paste-drag&drop. sampling in art, music and literature' and organised by Stefan Bidner and Thomas Feuerstein for the 'buro fur intermedialen kommunikationstransfer' of medien.kunst.tirol'. Judging from their names, I'm given to attribute Germanic origins to most of the contributing artists- no wait, they're not artists, more accurate to refer to them as technicians- and I'm not in a position to speculate as to whether any of them are more or less celebrated than the others. Indeed, it's takes a leap of faith even to imagine individual human beings behind these noises which are 'organised' around principles which have little to do with any human priorities and throw no light on any part of the human situation. As for human imagination, pah! can't you see from the sleeve graphics that we do not speak of such childish fantasies? We deal in data!

Yes I'm afraid the whole manner and vibe of this cold machine world turns me off like some people get sick in proximity to Yes- they don't have to hear a note of music, just one look at that Roger Dean gatefold and they're barfing like a Henry Cow record. Honestly though- the austerity, the mittel-European conservatism, the spurious aura of 'this is what we have now instead of High Art and modernism- aren't we the coolest for burning off those squares with their eviscerated myths and inflated sublimities?'- I could maybe handle it if the resulting noises were as crap-my-pants freaky as, say, Sun Ra or Otomo Yoshihide or even Grandpa Stockhausen, but paint me grey and ride me like an elephant- they're *incredibly boring to listen to*!!!! But you kind of get the impression that this is about as close to an idea any of the contributors have had: 'As we use samples to bore people to death, so sampling shall be our central metaphor, ahahaha (ironic, self-congratulatory laughter), the punchline in our distended and poorly-told joke- Have you heard the one about the neverending 1980's, the sclerosis of creative imagination and the death of youth culture?….blah blah blah….'.

Look, you know the deal here- it's like *The Wire* free CD compilation from Hell- imagine every time you heard a piece of McElectronica farting aimlessly away in the background and you switched it off or skipped to the next track in much the same way as you'd blow your nose, give the snot a cursory inspection and flush it away- well this is like two CD's-worth of these moments. You can't even dance to it. I suppose I could point out that CD2, track 11 brought a thin, old-man's smile to my lips when after centuries of boredom a track called 'Im Hotel' by M. Hentz featuring the voice of F. Kollges introduces itself with a volley of mouth-raspberries, wet chuckles, superheated oral gibberish and infantile grunts, which continues unabated for the duration. But this was by far the best thing to happen at any point in this journey into nihilism.

This compilation strikes me as a failure in all the ways I know how to measure success. It makes Kraftwerk sound like Fela Kuti. If this seems like it could be your bag, good luck, but I'd rather 'sample' some heroin than sit through this torment again.

JONATHAN HELLIER

www.myzel.net/sample-minds

Francisco López
belle confusion

Interview by **Gregory Gangemi**

OVER THE LAST TWENTY YEARS FRANCISCO López has been developing a powerful and consistent world of minimal electroacoustic soundscapes, 'trying to reach an ideal of absolute concrète music'. To date, his catalogue of recordings comprises more than 140 sound works, which have been released by 100 record labels from Spain, France, Italy, Germany, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Poland, Austria, UK, Norway, Greece, Russia, Canada, USA, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Japan, China and Australia. He has toured extensively throughout Western and Eastern Europe, North, Central and South America, Japan and Australia doing acousmatic performances, and he has received commissions from a number of renowned institutions and organizations, such as the Dutch and Spanish National Radios, The Goethe Institut, The V2 Organization (Rotterdam), Yale University Theater (New Haven), The Ralph Lemon Company (New York), The Zeitkratzer Ensemble (Berlin), Sound Traffic Control (San Francisco), Creative Time (New York) and Quartier Ephemere (Montreal).
Through 'the exploration of the universe of broad-band noise from the real world' (as he once called it), his music arises from the processing of environmental recordings. In deep contrast to the classical soundscape movement, his activity of making field recordings all over the world (nearly 40 countries in five continents) has never pursued a documentary or representational goal, but a dramatically opposite object-sonic perspective. This is, paradoxically, despite his past involvement with related organizations as the Environmental Tape Exchange, the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology and the Nature Sounds Society. And in this sense, the evolution of his aesthetics and conceptual background is a deep process of refinement towards an extreme musical purism, with a voluntary and forceful refusal of any visual, procedural, relational, semantic, functional or virtuoso elements. What remains is an astonishingly powerful musical essence capable of reaching both the deepest and most dreadful abysms of crude strength, and the most subtle and diffuse aural edges; a complex territory of anti fast-listening where perceptual awareness and the power of naked music are strikingly rediscovered; a world where things are uneasy, unclear, unsolved and where one is forced to immerse oneself, and search. He calls this condition *belle confusion*.

Interview took place via telephone, Brooklyn to Montreal 20 July 2002
g = Gregory Gangemi
f = Francisco López

g: You seem to, in your work, be concerned with the listening habits and capabilities of your audience.

f: In general yeah.

g: And their responses to your sounds.

f: Well, not their particular responses. I'm basically interested in a profound listening, in a listening experience that goes way beyond what is normal in music, I would say. And I tend to get immersed myself into what I consider to be a very profound, deeply touching, deeply transforming experience of listening. This is the way I listen to a lot of stuff and the way that for me is the most intense and the most important. So I try to give this, to promote this in my work. And that's what I basically try to offer in different ways in the recordings and in the live shows.

g: So you sort of encourage the listener to participate in these profound listening practices.

f: Absolutely. The only thing is that there is no specific definition of what this is. I don't have a specific meaning in what I do, I don't feel I have anything to express. And I think different people of course will have a completely different experience out of this intensity. For example, in the live shows I'm used to hearing quite different comments from the audience, and what each one is imagining can be radically different. And I like that because I think this is a way of keeping the music open in the content, in the meaning, or the possibilities of the music. I like that kind of thing.

g: So you emphasize a freedom on the part of the listener to have individual experience.

f: I try to promote that. There's a lot of possibilities for that, as opposed to other kinds of music where there is a more definite meaning in the music, either for dance, or like when you have words in songs, or when you have a very strong cultural connection with the music, like most rock-n-roll and pop music. I'm trying to do something different.

g: They seem to be trying to elicit a particular response from the audience.

f: I think so.

g: Whereas you're encouraging a more free approach to listening.

f: I think pop music in a very wide sense is narrowing more and more the possibilities for this. It's not only the

music and the words; it's also the video clips and all the industry around creating an image of a band, for example. And I think that over the years this has been narrowing more and more the possibilities of the meanings of music. The meaning and the interaction of anyone with music, with sound in general.

g: Do you hope that these types of practices that people may engage in while listening to your music will carry into their lives outside of say a particular listening environment to the experience of the world at large?

f: Oh I think so, I hope so. I'm sure in my case. Not only with my own work but in the work of other people I admire.

g: Your music often involves natural sounds and the sounds of the daily life.

f: Yeah, it has a direct connection with that. But it doesn't have a specific message, any specific thing to say about that. I think the more I have this kind of interaction with the world for creation, and collecting the materials from the world to create, the more I feel at a loss when it comes to explain what this connection is. I'm sort of lost with regards to the meaning of this connection. But the more I lose the meaning of all these things, the better I feel. I feel like it's expanding actually, and in that sense I'm moving more and more away from rationality. And that's my personal experience, what can I do?

g: So you're not concerned with making reference to particular sites or objects, but instead try to free the sound matter itself from a representational function. Is that correct?

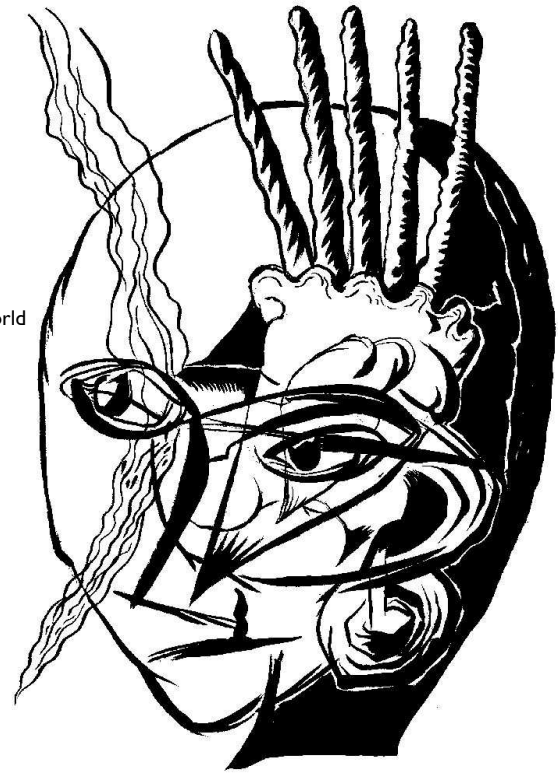
f: Yeah, absolutely. Of course sometimes I... for example, usually in the liner notes I use to say, well, this was recorded in such place... but there's no intention of doing a representation of a place, nor any intention of keeping this connection. For example, I don't share the fascination that a lot of people have, in the experimental community especially, of knowing that a certain sound comes from a certain really amazing fact, or place, or object or organism. I don't really feel that kind of fascination. Of course there are fascinating things in the world, that's for sure, but to me the world of sound has a value and an entity by itself. We're talking about a different world when we talk about that, and that really fascinates me, the possibilities. So yeah, for me this connection works very well, and I think it creates new worlds that I really feel fascinated about.

g: You say that you try to stay away from a definite pragmatic use value in sound.

f: In general, in life yeah. I think pragmatism is the worst thing that can happen to humankind. But I don't believe in humankind too much anyway, so that's not much to say (laughs). You know, I don't feel pragmatic at all, I think pragmatism is a way of looking at the world that I don't really share. That's a long thing to talk about, but anyway... I can give you an example: I think that the best way to die is to commit suicide; anyone doing that should feel proud of having done it. And I think that destroying oneself is a right that we all have. I'm a smoker, for example, and I am very proud of that, and I drink a lot... (laughs) I'm not really into drugs, I'm not really like wrecked, if you know what I mean, but I enjoy life intensely and have a joyful attitude towards that. So that means that if I know that in the process I'm destroying myself I think it's a natural thing to happen, as a human being. I think the pretension of us humans following a 'natural' life like in the new-age-y sense of the word... I think it's just sick. I really don't go for that. And you know I'm a biologist; and the more experience I have in nature, working in nature and experiencing nature, the more I believe this. But of course this is my personal experience, which is the only thing I can talk about actually. I don't try to impose my... I think this is another problem: there are too many people trying to impose their philosophy of life on the rest of the people, including those promoting pragmatism and a 'healthy' life. I think it's boring, extremely boring and impoverishing for humankind in general.

g: Can you just tie in your sound work a little bit with that?

f: Well I'm very interested in several things, one of them in relation to this question being the physicalization of sound. Mp3s are a good thing to use as an example of this. An mp3 of course is a lower quality version of something that exists before in a different format, and it's a good format to transfer the information, and for a lot of people this doesn't matter. Or I can use the radio as an example as well... I mean the radio... you're driving and you're listening to the radio in your car. Most people can of course recognize the melody of a song off the radio and it seems to be the same thing if you're listening to it on the radio or anywhere else; but there's an essential difference. For me the most important thing is the phenomenological difference, the really textural, physical difference of the sound in the different spaces and the different sound systems or the different conditions for listening. For a piece of music that has melody that's more difficult to tell because both melody and rhythm actually turn our perception away from the physicality of the sound. And when you're not dealing with melody or rhythm you can perceive this way more clearly. So for many of these kinds of sounds, and certainly for the kinds of sounds that I often use, you can perceive that very very clearly. I can transform a recording that I have on a CD in a live show in such an amazing way that you wouldn't believe it's the same thing. And that's only because of the sound system and the live interaction work with the space, the speakers etc. I mean, the transformation of the sound can be radical. I'm very interested in this physicalization. And of course also to give the listener -as I give to myself- an intense physical experience that is not only listening to the music but rather something that really makes your entire body vibrate and your spirit resonate; to feel that you are inside the sound, not that you are listening to it coming from some speakers. That's why I always use a surround system for the live shows. I



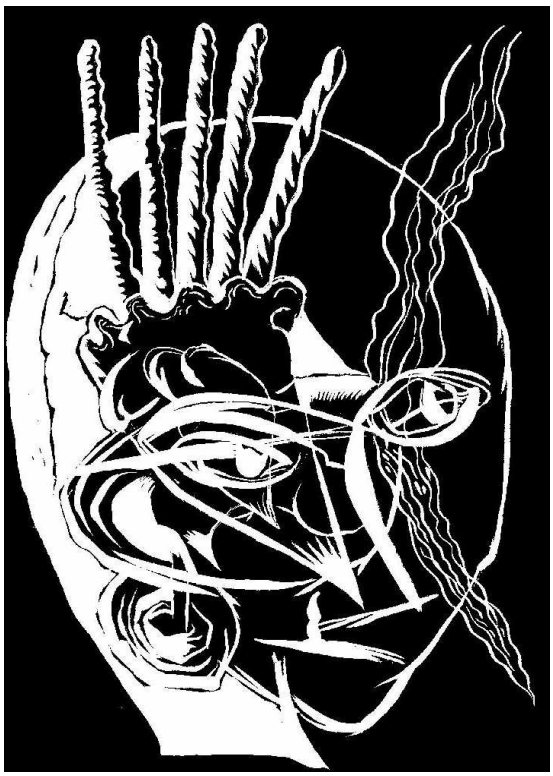
love to create sonic fields in which the listener has the experience that it's really difficult to tell where the sound is coming from and where are the sound sources. So you feel really immersed inside that. And I think this is a dramatically different experience to that of listening to some sound or music coming from some speakers or to that of watching a band on stage or some guy playing a laptop or something like that. That's something I don't really like. I don't go for that.

g: You think that the whole visual experience in general, if you're trying to become immersed in a sound environment, it detracts from the experience. Is that right?

f: I think so, from my experience, not from a theoretical point of view, from the direct experience that I have. I've done many shows and of course I've seen many shows and to me, this is really a problem. It becomes a serious problem. And a lot of people tell me they had the same kind of feeling. In my live performances, when they go through the performance blindfolded, most people say it really makes an incredible difference. Just because of this simple idea, it's not a big trick, it's just a simple thing to do. But when you do this, the difference is just amazing. And for me... it's my favorite kind of listening anyway. This is voluntary for anybody in the audience, and I think that it changes things dramatically. For example, just think about having someone with a laptop on stage... it's basically just following the tradition of rock-n-roll and pop in a very wide sense, and I don't think this is a good idea.

g: It makes the performer sort of an idol of the audience.

f: Well, it's an idol anyway, no matter what you do; if you're dancing like the Spice Girls or you have a laptop on stage you're an idol anyway for a different kind of people. Or you're an artist or a star or whatever. It's not so much about that. It's like... what is the reason for someone with a laptop to be on stage? I guess because up until now everybody was on stage, all the bands, all the musicians, and then the artist is again on stage. Originally, the reason for the musicians to be on stage was for people to be able to hear the music and see them of course. But now I think those reasons are not operating anymore. Or a DJ, for example... a DJ on stage, I don't see the point of that. It's



sort of following the traditional rock-n-roll show aesthetic, translating that directly into something else that could have more potential. I think that just reflecting a little bit about this there could be many other possible solutions that will change the whole possibilities of the experience at such a live performance, you know.

g: In a way this seems like a modernist preoccupation with viewing, say, a piece of visual art in a perfectly quiet, serene atmosphere and to not have anything take away from the direct experience of the art.

f: If somebody is looking at me during the live show, they will be looking at what I am doing with the equipment, trying to figure out how I am doing that, what is happening... I'm concerned with this because it's a problem and I don't want people to look at that. I want people to focus on what's going on in the space. And when you do that I think you're more free to go through that trip, you know, to go with the sound. I always cover the equipment, and I don't want the audience to see what I'm using. And I've used laptops and all kinds of things for the live shows, but to me that is irrelevant. It's better to have some kind of mystery about it. You don't know what it is, but you're there to enjoy the experience, or whatever you want to call it, to go through the experience. I mean, if someone has a specific technical interest, I have no problem talking about that, for sure. But in terms of the show I think it's a shame. A waste of experiential possibilities.

g: Is there something about different extreme types of sound, as in very quiet or very loud, of a prolonged duration, do you find, that encourages the practice of immersive listening?

f: I think you're right, there's something about going through unusual situations, from the point of view of traditional music or popular music, like long durations, very loud, very quiet and stuff. It certainly awakens something in your listening capabilities, I'm sure of that. For any normal... let's say 'normal' person listening to 'normal' music, if there is such a thing... you know what I mean, popular music... a song lasting thirty-five minutes or forty minutes or one hour will be crazy, will be weird, fucking really strange. Or a 'song' that contains, say. several minutes of silence, it is crazy, it is wrong, there's something wrong here, right? I think that in most popular music there are very specific schemes that have been created, very specific stereotypes about things, about structures, about durations, about loudness, and everything is in a very very very narrow area. And I think that whenever you are exposed to other things - if you enjoy them, of course- then you open your ears to those things. And I can feel that in a lot of people, though I have no interest at all in convincing anyone of these things, in promoting these things. I think it's impossible to promote these things. If a certain person doesn't have the sensibility for this kind of thing, if this person doesn't like this kind of 'unusual' way, you can try really hard and you won't get anything.

g: How would you situate yourself today in terms of the direction that you see art or sound going? Do you see yourself moving along with a broader social movement at all?

f: No. I felt all my life, in many respects, quite like a lonesome guy. I feel that I go through most experiential things on my own, in many respects. That's the way I feel and that's the way I like it, actually. I have many friends in the 'experimental' community, and I do things with a lot of people, and I feel happy to do them with different kinds of people and different kinds of communities within the experimental underground, but I never felt attached to any of these particular movements, or trends or whatever. I've been pigeonholed in categories such as 'lowercase', 'environmental', 'noise', 'metal', whatever. I have no interest in belonging to any of them. I've released stuff on a hundred labels worldwide, which I think gives a good sense about my attitude towards 'scenes'. But then also I don't belong to a certain particular aesthetic. I like to be free to play around with things with my own perspective. And this, I think, is the best anyone can do. I'm not the only one doing that, for sure. I appreciate personality in general, I like strong personalities, that's what I look for, what I perceive as something appealing. And in that sense I really don't like movements or collectives. I never felt like belonging to a collective, never felt comfortable about that.

g: You're from Europe, and you spend a lot of your time of the year performing and working in Europe, is that right?

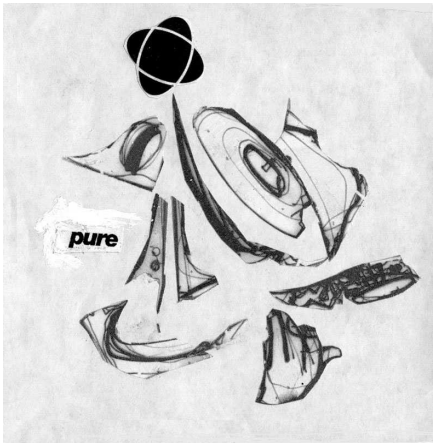
f: I was born in Madrid, in Spain, and I still live there, but for the last fifteen years or so I've been spending a significant amount of time on the road; traveling very often for many different projects, for shows, for projects with recordings, and also in relation to biology. I'm also a biologist and I teach in Costa Rica and Cuba and I've been doing research on biology in many countries, which of course provides me with great opportunities to experience lots of very exceptional wilderness sonic environments.

g: Do you find that the reception to your work is different coming from Spain and Europe to say Canada or the United States? Is the cultural climate different, do you see?

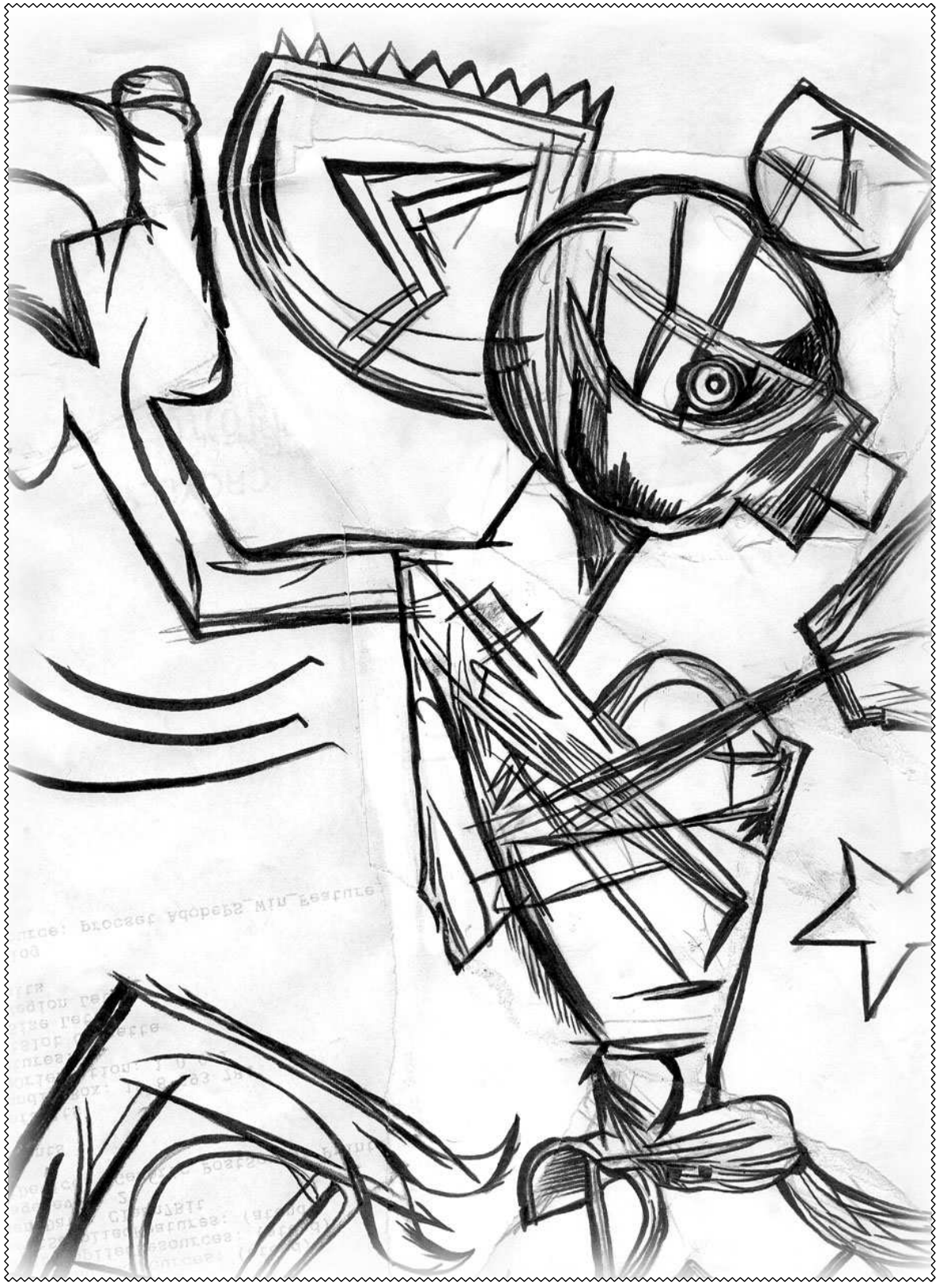
f: Yeah, there are differences in the reactions when people tend to rationalize the experience, I would say; in reviews, in theoretical ruminations about what you do... but in terms of the more personal, physical or spiritual reaction, especially to the live shows, I feel there is a common ground. There is something that I'd like to believe is universal in what I'm trying to do, because it often seems to touch really deep layers of the spirit of a lot of people, for audiences of very diverse places, like for example Japan or Cuba, you know, or South America and Germany or whatever. I'm more interested in that very common ground for a lot of people than in cultural differences. I'm interested in the creation of intense experiences that can in some way touch something that belongs to the spirit, in a universal sense.

The above interview is an excerpt from the new book from CHRONOPLASTICS entitled SOUND GENERATION. SOUND GENERATION is a survey of contemporary sound arts, featuring interviews with twenty artists employing a diverse range of practices: concrete music, noise, ambient, microsound; voice collage, radio narrative and 'ear-films'; field and environmental recording; architectural acoustics and sound installation; extreme amplification and oscillating structures; public audio intervention; microradio. SOUND GENERATION also includes a 2-CD audio compilation of artists' works.

Wholesale and retail purchasing information for SOUND GENERATION and other CHRONOPLASTICS publications is available at www.chronoplastics.com.



BOXING MAN IN MORTIC



VAGINA DENTATA ORGAN

VAGINA DENTATA ORGAN is the name of Jordi Valls' 'art project' which released four astonishing LP art-objects in the 1980s, and UN CHIEN CATALAN, the famous motorcycle CD in the early 1990s. The four LPs were VAGINA DENTATA ORGAN PRESENTS : MUSIC FOR THE HASHISHINS, IN MEMORIAM OF HASSAN-I-SABBAH. (TRAINED TO KILL/SEXUAL), a recording of a snarling attack dog; THE LAST SUPPER, THE REVEREND JIM JONES IN PERSON, made from a tape of the Jonestown Massacre; VAGINA DENTATA ORGAN WITH THE PAGAN DRUMS OF CALANDA. (THE TRIUMPH OF THE FLESH), a documentary recording of an old Spanish village drumming custom; and COLD MEAT/EROS & THANATOS. (SEX STAR I/SEX STAR II), the infamous 'sex' record made up of porno soundtracks. (I think they were released or distributed under the aegis of Genesis P. Orridge, friend of Jordi since 1978.) His latest release, *The Perpignan Killings*, is a sickeningly intense remix of all the above LPs. Jordi not only makes unforgettable sound recordings, but he activates further layers of meaning with his ingenious titles (the track titles on the motorcycle CD are pure dada poetry), and startling choice of imagery - as the examples below should illustrate. His painter brother Marc contributes much to the art project, as do other collaborators who assisted with his bacchanalian exhibit / happening event for his blood paintings. Spaniard Jordi is a passionate and fiery monster, without any trace of false modesty - he considers his own records to be 'fucking brilliant', with some justification. For further visceral delights, read on.

EP Your records, especially those related to sex and death, have a kind of LEGENDARY quality…everyone purports to know something about them, even without having heard them! Did you set out to create a modern myth?

JV Perhaps it's true. We aim to go beyond logic, and have the intellectual freedom and the imagination of the Marquis de Sade. That's why VDO's records are so fucking brilliant. I work at random, and the recordings are the result of the theory of chaos. The final outcome is absolutely unpredictable, it's what the mathematicians call CHANCE. I work mostly from real time reality. Raw authenticity always strikes a bigger blow to our inner psyche. The intensity of a sexual groan, or a plane crash, is more powerful and passionate than the artificial sound of a man-made musical instrument. Let me

explain it in a different context. It is said that one image is worth 1000 words. Well, I say that one small accidental sound could be worth 1000 images, or even 1000 music scores. I saw the documentary filmed by the two French brothers during the Twin Towers suicide attack. What persisted longer in my memory, was not the hardcore images of panic and destruction, but the SOUND heard from inside one of the buildings of falling bodies from the top of the towers crashing to the open ground. I will never forget that crashing staccato noise. I have it on tape.

EP Do you feel you have much in common with the spirit of the Surrealist movement – which Surrealist artists, poets or writers do you most admire?

JV Salvador Dalí is the only true Surrealist of the 20th century, not only as a painter, but specifically as a writer too. Anyone who writes: 'The first time I saw a woman's depilated armpit I was seeking heaven', deserves to be a genius. Since I was very young, I always felt close to Surrealism, and very connected to Dalí's work. When I'm in Catalonia my home is in Cadaqués, the epicentre of Surrealism, a place with very strong cosmic and

telluric magnetism. In fact, the landscape is like a painting by Salvador Dalí, he lived there.

EP *Un Chien Catalan*, is to me, a piece of sonic poetry – Surrealist and Futurist, even, (Speed and power, words in freedom). I also liken it to a piece of avant-garde cinema, and to a very extreme Hollywood road movie / biker movie. Can you add any comment?

JV *Un Chien Catalan*, it is surrealist, metaphysical, and mechanical, but has absolutely nothing to do with the Futurist, which I dislike. It is the sound of the engine of a motorbike during one long hour ride - real time - around the house of Dalí, in Port Lligat, Cadaqués, and Cap de Creus. The star of the show is the motorbike of my biker friend Eliseu Huertas i Cos. It was recorded in a very cold winter night with strong tramuntana wind. I approached this recording as if it was an obscure film, or some kind of literary masterpiece about violent death. You have to read the titles of the 7 tracks to get the full impact and full picture of it. It's an absolute metamorphosis. The noise of the engine is transformed into a mantra. It's a paradox. The motorbike's rattle becomes dervish music with

feedback. At some point, it sounds like a meeting in hell between Jimi Hendrix and Stockhausen. On one very memorable day, *Un Chien Catalan* was played on the sound system at the Salvador Dalí museum in Figueres. Dalí's embalmed body lies at rest in a crypt beneath his museum. What more can I ask for? Dalí is the real Catalan dog.

EP The simplest art actions can say so much, and remain memorable for so long. Why is this? You have somehow transformed riding a motorbike into an action that everyone can remember, but how?

JV First of all, it's alchemy. Also because of the transformation from real time reality, into metaphysical realism, which is the ultimate nature of reality. Somehow, we freeze-frame the past, and then the past becomes immortal. People listening to VDO's records get this feeling of immortality, but don't know how to explain it. Another essential part of VAGINA is the work made by my brother Marc Valls. Impossible to disconnect all the VDO discography, from his fetish graphics.

EP Has anyone ever called your work 'absurdist' – and what is your reply?

JV VAGINA DENTATA ORGAN is poetry without rhetoric. All of our records are absolutely different from one to the other. Nevertheless, people still feel the need to categorize VDO's work in one single word. We have been called 'absurdist', and 'bruitism', among other names. I say we're a cosmic vagina, but at the same time we want blood on our hands, against all the putrefacts of pop music. I despise the blandness and all the pedantic sentimentality of these cretins.

EP The new record - *Perpignan* – is so intense it makes me FEEL SICK, literally. Is that the intended effect?

JV That's the greatest compliment I could ever have. *Perpignan* is a masterwork. My big selling point for *The Perpignan Killings*, is that it's totally indigestible. That's marketing for you. But you're not alone with your trouble. The director of the Art school of Grenoble, in France, vomited while listening to *Perpignan*, on his own. I like my work to be physically and psychologically threatening. *Perpignan* is exactly what Breton said, about convulsive beauty. Incidentally, I would like to make the point that it belongs to an extremely rare class of record.

EP Tell me a bit more about your blood paintings. Were they exhibited? Are you aware of Joe Coleman's painting made out of his blood, shit, piss, semen etc? Do you align yourself with body art / performance art of this visceral nature?

JV I started selling my blood for money in 1984. The blood was encapsulated dry under the transparent vinyl on a few picture-disc records of *The Pagan Drums of Calanda*. I sold each of the blood records for

£100. Now it's worth £1000 each disc. I'm aware of Joe Coleman's, and also Franko B's work, but I'm more into pleasure, than pain. More interested in the work of Marc Quinn, who made his 3-D self-portrait with his own frozen blood. To me, Quinn, the Chapman brothers, Tracy Emin, Damien Hirst, they are the new shamans of the 21st century. Of course, I'm only relating for now to what's near me here in London. Then in 1993 –1995, I started painting on big canvases with my own blood the portraits of fashion Supermodels. I have a catalogue of the paintings. For three years, once a month, a nurse took my blood with an hypodermic needle into several glass vials ready to paint. In 2001, I was invited by the Art School of Grenoble, for an exhibition of the paintings, all paid by the French government. Instead of hanging the paintings on the wall, the blood canvases were thrown to the floor on top of several white cotton bed sheets, just like dead bodies lie on the asphalt after a motorway accident. Marc and Eric Hurtado of Étant Données, and my brother Marc who came from Barcelona, helped magnificently with all the production side of it. The exhibition hall was huge, like a tennis court, we kept it dark with a white spotlight from the ceiling to the floor on the dumped blood paintings. On the day of the `private view', I invited all the

art students at the school to paint vaginas, graffiti with spray cans, all over the white walls. At the same time we had six slide projectors projecting very fast, non-stop, life-size colour photos

of top Supermodels dressed or nude on the catwalk, on the walls all over the large room. Also two film projectors projecting at the same time on very large and different wall screens, a collage of the films I made with Derek Jarman, and Genesis P-Orridge, about my car crash. And other films of when I was in Spain, performing in `La edad de Oro'`, on T.V. Also, more films about the actual recording of *The Pagan Drums of Calanda*. Meanwhile, the Hurtado brothers had a mixing table, re-mixing VAGINA's records full blast through the sound system. The whole night had the classic structure of an art gallery `private view'. We had a price list of the paintings, with impossible prices. A visitor's book for people to sign and write comments and impressions. A professional barman serving free champagne and drymartinis. It was catastrophically good, and chaotic. A perfect Vagina Dentata Organ night. With blood on the floor. □

Jordi Valls, London, 21/01/2003
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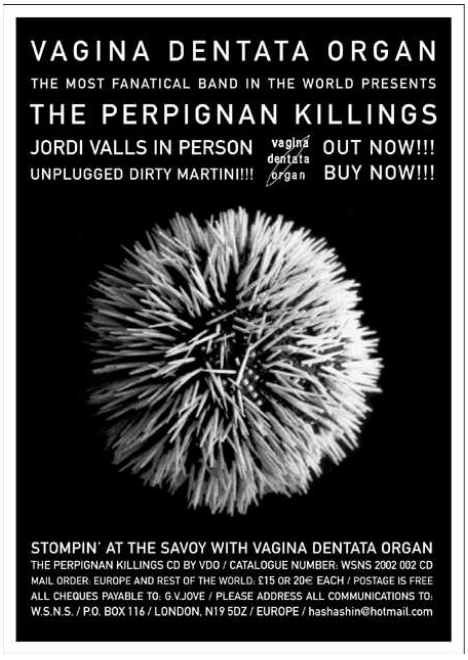
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A bit of the crust

By Chris Atton

mostly improvised...

Pocket
Pocket
UNITED KINGDOM 2:13 MUSIC 2:13CD013 CD (2002)

Wivid
Summer Solstice
UNITED KINGDOM KLINKER ZOUNDZ KZ0206 CD (2002)

Vestige Vertical
Vestige Vertical
GERMANY X-TRACT X-T 2003 CD (2001)

Pocket's collection of a dozen guitar instrumentals kicks off sounding like one of those indie bands John Peel still finds wondrous. Takes me back to the heyday of Sarah Records where every jangly quartet found space for at least one instrumental like this. The remaining pieces are, thankfully, somewhat more varied and hardly a surf/beat instrumental cliché is left unused. Where Pocket score, though, is in the richness and complexity of their compositions, all from the pen of guitarist John Bisset (who, along with bassist Christopher Evans, is a member of the London Electric Guitar Orchestra). The inventive turns and runs of 'Stretch Marks' and 'Wily Coyote' successfully push the boundaries of the exhilaration and drama of surf music, dropping into territory more usually associated with Massacre or Zorn's Naked City. Lots of fun here, which is a rarity amongst the stuff I usually get to review in these pages. Even wunderkind Alex Ward, forsaking his clarinet for guitar here, impresses. Still, the Englishness of it all shines through, rendering it either extremely charming or not a patch on The Phantom Surfers. You choose.

From improvisers playing compositions to improvisers, well, improvising. Wivid present three lengthy improvisations recorded at Hugh Metcalfe's Klinker Club on the Summer Solstice, 2001. In addition to Metcalfe himself on guitar and violin, we have Will Evans (drums), Mike Johns (soprano) and David Leahy (bass). This quartet play that classic, European style that emerged with the Spontaneous Music Ensemble in the 1960s and reached its apogee for some in the detailed, virtuosic fidgeting of John Russell's Quaqua. So this is a fine, representative example of that. Without wishing to denigrate it, though, there seems little here that we haven't heard before - even Metcalfe seems uncharacteristically mellow.

By contrast, the German electro-acoustic trio Vestige Vertical present over an hour of powerful, focussed improvisation. Huge twangings, pianissimo plucks, bowed percussion and the clanging of great gongs are sampled - for once tastefully - and the pieces reconstructed from within. This is massive music, yet tightly controlled, never overstated. An object lesson in how to build the organic from the digital.

CHRIS ATTON

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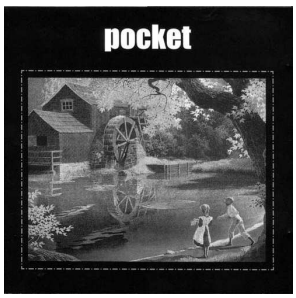
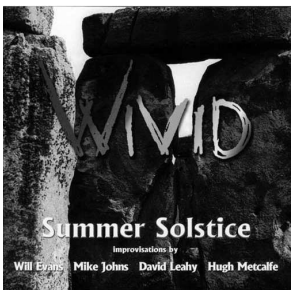
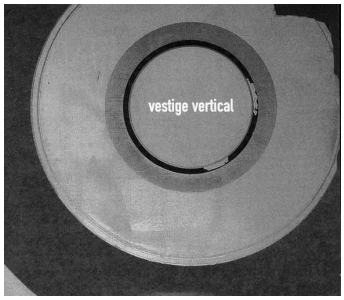
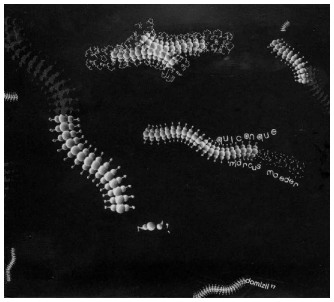
Klinker Zoundz, 10 Malvern House, Stamford Hill Estate, London N16 6RR.
www.theklinker.freeserve.co.uk
www.podewil.de (for x-tract)









mostly composed...

Marcus Maeder
Quiconque
SWITZERLAND DOMIZIL 17 CD (2002)

Thilges 3
Die Offene Gesellschaft
GERMANY STAUBGOLD 33 CD (2002)

Anton Nikkila
White Nights
RUSSIA / FINLAND N&B RESEARCH DIGEST NBRD-05 CD (2002)

Arbeit
An den Deutschen Mond
GERMANY TEXTXTND/DEUTSCHLAND RADIO EFS SP 103 / LC 10001 CD (2001)

Soixante Étages
ASBL
FRANCE 33REVPERMI 2206 CD (2002)

Lots of scuffling in the undergrowth from Maeder. Reminds me of some of the more 'programmatic' Cinema pour l'Oreille releases on Metamkine, where you are encouraged to imagine the protagonist wandering alone in a trackless waste. Noisier than Bernhard Günter (who isn't?), but of a similar aesthetic. Ed's written 'contemplative' on the press release, which is fair enough - what it's contemplative about is another matter. Not as monumental as Tangerine Dream's *Zeit*, that's for sure (for one thing, it's under 40 minutes and divided into 8 tracks), but the dead pace at which many of the track unfold is of that ilk and, for me, very appealing. I could have done without the skittery, randomised electronic interludes. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not looking for aesthetic consistency, here, nor do I hanker after some postmodern effigy of mood music. It's simply that when I feel that musicians do something particularly well they should focus on that, at least till they exhaust the possibilities. Maeder could do a lot more with his understated and moody electronics. A further case in point is thilges3, whose mini-CD *polka* on Staalplaat I raved about in ish 9. There they demonstrated an inspiriting inventiveness with the 'microtechno' format over a single, thirty minute piece. I expected more of the glittering same with *Die Offene Gesellschaft*. Whilst some of those qualities are still in evidence during the shorter pieces, the longer segments (around the 10-minute mark) instead suggest those throbbing, far more forceful electronic organics of Dieter Moebius and his various post-Cluster cohorts. Many of these pieces emerge from or recede into indistinct German chit-chat, lending an impromptu, diary-like cast to the whole.

Anton Nikkila's release certainly has a programme. In what I suppose we should think of as a concept album (must we?) he aims to fuse the Soviet cult of technology with a radical reformulation of Muzak. What I hear, though, are a set of sampled Muzak pieces rendered 'postmodern' through repetition, delay and synthesising. These are interspersed with a set of 'industrial' electronic pieces, representing, I assume, the Soviet cult of technology. The concept seems largely unrealised. I find the treatment of the Muzak selections extremely annoying, if only because they are still clearly recognisable as their wretched, easy listening originals. Forgive me for being so unhip, but I don't find listening to Muzak at all enjoyable, however tricked out it may be in the latest digital baubles.

Arbeit also work hard to rework existing cultural resources. Their project of 'revised folk songs' follows a predictable model. Each 'revision' comprises of a solo rendition of a song, overlaid by digital interruptions, subtle chordal accompaniments, beatboxes and at times blurts of extreme noise. The model wears thin after a while. The sole female voice of the group is accorded perhaps the most compelling arrangements. These range from the simplest (the performance interrupted by nothing more than silence) to a radical trip-hop take.

Soixante Étages certainly take their time: five albums in twenty years. This recording is the product of a nine-strong collective featuring some key names in contemporary electroacoustic music, amongst them Lionel Marchetti and Jérôme Noetinger. If this were an LP the first four tracks would comprise side one. These are driven by a rough guitar, bass and drums trio whose approach to the blues, the boogie and heavy metal remind one of the obsessive skewedness Faust originally brought to those styles, the riffs and rhythms overlaid with massed electronics of varying unpleasantness. These tracks even have vocals of a sort, with two of the texts coming from Ginsberg and one from Captain Beefheart (Nav). The remaining five tracks give the electronics full rein, offering what we'd have thought of in the 1970s as the 'difficult' side, but which today we can simply enjoy as densely-constructed improvisations. If you need a record that demonstrates how Faust should have developed, instead of the nonsense they've been churning out the past ten years, this is it. A magnificent record, too, without the Faustian referents - a powerful essay in rock electronics that, for me, blows the archness and irony of such as Ground Zero right out of the water.

CHRIS ATTON

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AS11

New CD out now!

GREECE ANTIFROST AFRO 2013 3" CD (2002)

More meat for those European avant-tech sandwiches you crave....Another sausage oozes from the macerator and already I'm tying my disco shoelaces and blaming it, as you do, on the boogie. Think I'll lose myself in these body-poppin' grooves tonight and maybe never come back! But I guess it doesn't work that way any more. Insofar as this record catalyses my escapist tendencies, it does so only to dash them maniacally against the jagged edges of mutant moons as it flies through transPlutonic space on a suicide mission- blind, uncaring, meaningless, dangling the listener in its claws. Yes, that's right- a bit like Shania Twain. You could line-dance to it if you really tried: this music understands hate (important when line-dancing) even if it disdains to actually hate anything in particular, preferring a more Gnostic approach in contrast to the take-it-personally sadism of, say, Whitehouse.

AS11
NEW CD OUT NOW!

Given that these sounds are out to negate you, it's still a wild ride, with much to enjoy. The artist has seen fit to bisect the listening experience in a manner that strikes me as slightly incongruous- about halfway through the movie flips to a commercial break, and an ingratiating voice is thanking us for buying the CD and suggesting others we might like, available now on Antifrost!- ok, you might argue a touch of whimsy is always welcome, but you'd probably be a sissy if you did. Me, I don't want the conjuror to show me how it's done- I find illusions are more real than mechanistic explanations anyhow. This quibble aside, I suppose the break does serve to demarcate the point where the intensity of the sounds increases. Prior to it, there's a lot of umber-grey silence, ominous hissing, and a lonely two-note refrain which together evoke interstellar wastes and interminable journeys between dead husks very nicely. But really this is just about establishing an appropriately severe background for the pageant of violence that follows. My giddy aunt! Scraping-noises of impossible depth and intimacy; platinum feedback soaring like metal birds though chlorine skies; piglets squealing as witches grind them against helicopters. It's awful! And there's more: he lets it build irresistibly like a massing tsunami instead of lapsing into kitsch as lesser warlocks might. The final eight minutes or so are like riding the spinal escalator down from the brainstem into atavistic basements of lust. The noise twists and rotates multidirectionally: we lose the centre and begin to black out though oxygen deprivation, but by this time the artist has wrenched our mortal ears through zones of high magick into the screaming diamond infinities that we incarnated into matter in a futile attempt to avoid dealing with...

Oh, it's finished. Cup of tea?

JONATHAN HELLIER

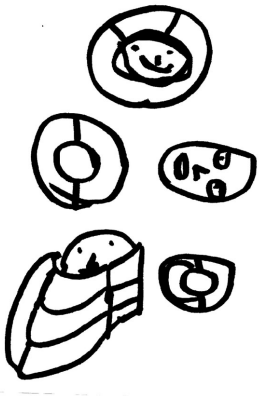
www.antifrost.gr

Antenna Farm / Main

AF_M

THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT BROMBRON 01 CD (2001)

Staalplaat could not have done better to introduce its new Brombron series than to bring the Antenna Farm duo and Robert Hampson / Main together for an intensive week of improv collaboration at Extrapool studio in Nijmegen which resulted in this CD *AF_M*. (All right, I know the second CD in the series was released first, I don't how that happened. Put it down to hitches and mix-ups in the label's release schedule.)



AF-M is a very focussed recording that demands your full attention - shut all the doors and windows, turn off the TV, radio and any other extraneous source of sound and send all the relations or the flatmates off to the cinema. I can't say which parts of the CD come from Main or Antenna Farm (I will hazard a guess and say the more minimal-sounding bits are Main's contributions as would also be his spare approach and use of space) but perhaps in this context ignorance is not such a bad thing, as all the sounds work well as one continuous piece. Dividing the work into 5 tracks, with passages ranging from serene and austere to queasy, and even harsh and violent, the artists explore space, texture, atmosphere and other ideas and concepts with commendable economy and restraint. I imagine the threesome learnt a great deal from one another and as a result their future work, whether done autonomously or in collaboration with others, will be enriched by their shared experience.

The instruments used on *AF_M* include guitars, contact microphones, Powerbook laptops, a mixing desk and field recordings. When you see this list and similar ones on other people's recordings, you realise terms like 'computer music', 'laptop music', 'electronica', 'acoustic music' and all other terms that classify music according to the types of instruments used or the processes involved no longer have any currency - musicians will use whatever instruments or methods they believe best does the job, be they laptops, guitars or even aluminium tubing. Still, if you feel more secure with labels than without, perhaps it's time to reclassify music using a different set of criteria, maybe one based on listener-oriented criteria than on supply-side criteria.

JENNIFER HOR

www.staalplaat.com

James Coleman

Zuihitsu

USA SEDIMENTAL SEDCD 30 CD (2000)

The theremin is a unique instrument, wholly electronic yet requiring physical effort and gesture to be played, rather than mere knob twiddling or mouse clicking. It is also possibly the only instrument that is played without being touched, consisting as it does of a box and an antenna around which the performer waves his hand, producing a diverse range of timbres.

The trademark sound of the theremin is a kind of spooky wail, often employed in the soundtracks of horror and science fiction films as a reliable way of imparting fear or disquiet. This may seem a wholly appropriate and respectable use of the instrument, but it is clearly not enough for certain musicians, who have been determined to 'extend' its application into areas of experimental music practice.

In recent years, alt-rock chancers such as Blur, Sonic Boom and Portishead have all been observed adding the theremin's trademark eerie whistle to their records. Without exception, this trend signifies creatively stunted artists making glib bids to add artistic credibility – what *The Wire* has felicitously identified as the It's Really Experimental syndrome.

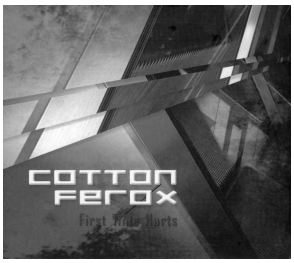
James Coleman would no doubt wish to distance himself from the names mentioned above. His music foregrounds the theremin, rather than using it merely to add interest. The Sedimental press release, meanwhile, claims that the label 'releases original music made by artists devoted to their craft, without concern to trend'. Sadly, however, Coleman is part of the trend whether he likes it or not, and however serious he professes his engagement with the instrument to be. The dilettantes who came before him have irreversibly defined the terms with which any later musician can engage with the theremin.

This project is therefore doomed from the outset. It consists of fifteen short pieces, on which Coleman's theremin is the only constant presence. He is variously joined by trumpet, cello, saxophone, percussion and voice, and on two tracks by an 'experimental chamber music group'. Coleman claims to draw inspiration from AMM, among others, but there is little of that group's restless creativity in these crabbed improvisations. Nor do he and his cohorts approach the instrumental dexterity of a Rowe or a Prevost.

The title 'Zuihitsu' translates as 'miscellany', and Coleman has deliberately chosen to articulate his vision in brief, spasmodic flurries. This decision is fatal. Instead of playing to the theremin's strengths and utilising its singular tone to create other-worldly atmospheres, Coleman resolves to demonstrate the instrument's avant garde capabilities through a barrage of blips, flips and skips that vie for bloodlessness and inconsequentiality.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.zuihitsu.net



Cotton Ferox

First Time Hurts

SWEDEN KOOKS ORG CD 001 C CD (2002)

Dull gothic ambiences drift and loop beneath toe-curling spoken word (in)sincerity. Too self-conscious to ever successfully carry off the pretensions on which this work feebly trundles.

ALASDAIR WILLIS

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EAR

Continuum

UNITED KINGDOM SPACE AGE RECORDINGS ORBIT026CD CD (2001)

An excellent recent one from Sonic Boom (Peter Kember), whose solo career since the 1990s has developed to the point where his music is now a fascinating mix of styles and sources - sort of like La Monte Young meets Delia Derbyshire. The latter emulation is entirely planned, as Sonic had befriended Derbyshire towards the end of her life and has conducted much research into her work, and that of the Radiophonic Workshop. He has consciously tried to cultivate many of the qualities of that music which he most admires into his own work. Using mainly his beloved EMS Synthi AKS, on *Continuum* he generates eight episodes of semi-narrative blip and swigger noise that are exceptionally appealing. Nary a duff cut on the whole album, each excursion builds up gradually and arrives at a fascinating overloaded complexity by close of track, despite simple beginnings. This exponential growth factor seems to be one of the most powerful aspects of the EMS's capabilities. Each track inhabits a different sound-world, and leaves plenty of space for the listener to wander around, and explore.

A true master of programming and manipulating his instruments, Sonic Boom never once sounds 'lost' in the virtual forest of jackplugs he's negotiating, nor adrift in the artifice of the enclosed studio world. Rather, he is always in control, studiously immersed in his erudite electronic research, publishing and releasing only those statements which are fully formed. He's in a totally different league to many of the laptopper brigade, who seem like footling dilettantes in comparison, allowing the 'default rules' of ProTools and soundfiles to govern their wretched output, and exercising little discernment when it comes to selecting material for release. If more evidence is needed, check out Sonic when he does it live on stage - his total absorption and depth of concentration in the sound-generation process is evident.

Although he's risen to a new plateau of achievement since the days of Spacemen 3, Sonic continues to exhibit a subtler preoccupation with music that simulates the drug experience. 'Shimmer' in particular has a very hypnotic 'stoner' effect with its steady vibrating tones. But there's also the ethereal beauty of 'Ebb', a little musical-box styled rondello suspended in buzz and shivery tones; Florian Fricke would have been proud. 'Whisper incantor' is the strangest cut, lots of eerie voice treatments swimming in a whirlpool of delirium. Pink Floyd famously used en EMS synthi on their *Dark Side* LP (with Delia Derbyshire's assistance and tutelage), but in the final analysis this is really the kind of LP they probably spent their careers wishing they could have come up with, but never came close.

ED PINSENT 20/11/2002

PO Box 8, Corby, Northants NN17 2XZ, UK

Efzeg

Boogie (dedicated to John Lee Hooker)

GERMANY GROB 430 CD (2002)

Listen closely and you'll hear the sound of John Lee Hooker spinning in his grave. Any pissed-off phantom worth his ectoplasm would haunt these fuckers to their grave for making this pile of shit.

A harsh judgement, perhaps? Well maybe you'd feel the same if you'd had to listen to this album too. An album dedicated to John Lee Hooker you might expect to have some allusion to 'the blues'. But no, not this one. We're cast adrift in art prank territory. From the sleevenotes: 'The raw, uncompleted quality of Efzeg music refers to the only eternal song the recently deceased John Lee Hooker played; refers to the monolith, which itself originates in process, to the multi-layered monochrome.'

Hmmmm…..here we go again, kids. Fuzz, drone, fuzz….the occasional bleep of R2-D2…more fuzz…oh, hang on, it's building up to something…no, only more fuzz. On and on and on, forever. It's like I've crash landed on a vast planet of fog, with a polluted atmosphere full of static and only a broken radio salvaged from the wreckage. I know what they're playing at here but it's been done before - Merzbow's *Ecobondage* was much more effective as a haunted planet vibe – so what else do they have to offer? Nothing. Nothing at all. This is pure math music, dull and utterly soulless. There's guitar and saxophone and turntables in there, but it's all been subsumed into the process to produce the audio-equivalent of a multi-layered Photoshop image that is all machine, with no trace of the artist's humanity left intact. I'm all for experimentation and trying new things and exploring – that's what art is all about – but if the results are shit then you have to realise that, bin them, and start again. As WS Burroughs sagely reminds us: 'Never hang on to a dud.'

RIK RAWLING 23/12/2002

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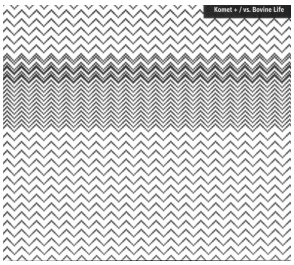

Komet + vs Bovine Life

Reciprocess = / vs. Volume One

FRANCE / UNITED KINGDOM BIP-HOP RECORDS /FALLT BLEEP 10 CD (2002)

I'll be upfront from the off: I wasn't engaged by these recordings. No pictures formed in my mind that didn't dissolve again immediately, leaving no trace. No fantasies of impossible magic-realist musics settled like tropical butterflies on my hair and shoulders, feeding on the salt-crystals produced by my floridly hallucinating liver. Aphrodite remains unborn for another 73 minutes; no goddess rises from the white-whipped sea, no treats, no cuddles- just the primal chaos of the deep, a few anorexic seahorses and another seventeen tracks of zzzzzz.

I will never play this CD again, though that shouldn't necessarily be construed as too damning a criticism, since it might well be better than similar others but I'm not 'with it' enough to notice or care. It certainly seems to be the case that the authors of *Reciprocess + / vs. Volume One* (namely Frank Bretschneider, aka Komet, from Berlin, formerly of the band AG.GEIGE, and Chris Dooks, aka Bovine Life, from Edinburgh, who runs the web-based label Social Electrics) regard their collaboration as a creative high-point for them both, and I'm certainly not here to argue with that or snidely put anybody down- but for me there is a dearth of vision in this work that bespeaks a frightening level of myopia and introverted, autoerotic dickplay. I enjoy an infantilistic element in music as much as the next adult-baby- glam, Beefheart, bubblegum, Masonna - yet I cannot deny the discomfiture I feel at this sort of fingers-in-my-dinner sound-assemblage passing itself off as having anything much to tell us about what happens when two very different sensibilities attempt mutual reflection and reification. Does that make me whatever passes for square nowadays? Who cares, I'm just a person (aw, shucks) who's fed up with interactivity (and the ideologues that push it to the forefront of our denuded cultural life) and who cheerfully affirms his preference for an authentically interactive experience of life, art and imagination over a signposted, commodified, cyborg pastiche of same. In this recording I encounter a yin deficit- common enough among despotic kings, mad scientists and butch dykes, unfortunately it tends to constellate unhealthily wherever somatically-challenged menfolk gather with a view to binding the thirsty mess of bodily and psychological reality in spirit-manacles (i.e., at the apex of every power-structure, this being the nature of patriarchal society!). And the new 'interactivity' is its Trojan horse, selling you shares in your own continuing disenfranchisement and exile. What a farce. When I read in the press-release that 'the design of the series reflects the different contributors with artwork that is readable from top to bottom, back to front and left to right- paper-based interactivity', I turn sullen and long for a syphilitic decadence to overrun the sterile platforms of Baal.

But you don't want to hear about my problems, do you? I sailed across this recording from centre to edge, and you'd like this old CD-dog to regale you with tall tales of monsters from its briny depths, wouldn't you? A blander voyage I cannot recall: my crew overcome with ennui, my parrot brooding and gaunt, we chased the ghost-forms of some archaic early 90s 'intelligent techno' euphoria until we could no longer stand the gap between promises and facts. Sad micro-rhythms churned on like wind among the leaves of the last tree in the Universe, but the sense of a moment lost proved so overwhelming, it felt disrespectful to continue hoping for orgasm. I turned my ship around and sailed home, wondering if I'd not been misguided in the first place to intrude upon this featureless eulogy to a lost paradise which was never mine to begin with...

JONATHAN HELLIER

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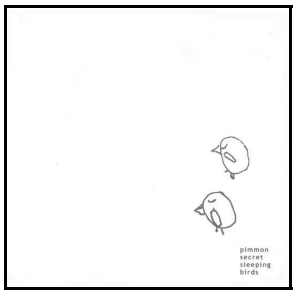

Pimmon

Secret Sleeping Birds

PORTUGAL SIRR.ECORDS SIRR 2005 CD (2001)

An excellent and very convincing new set of digital flower-arranging from the man who always delivers the milk on time. This Australian electro-soloist certainly rises above the herd of most of the goons making the milk run at 7am - his work always has polish and is clearly put together with a rare intelligence, but above all else he has a real sense of the now, the moment. Concrete events happen, and they leave some form of residue on the disc; impermeable stains are left on the listener's brain, and psyche. Given that one would hope all music would do something like this, it may not appear that Pimmon has gained much of an achievement, but it shows how *empty* much electronic music is fast becoming to me; I've probably heard a little too much flim-flam and hoaxery that, for all its pretentious rhetoric, delivers precisely zero.

Pimmon's more of a hands-on worker, I suspect. He might have a simple formula at work; he usually sets no more than three or four disparate elements running together on a single track, and lets the time-based processes of chance and happenstance contribute to the composition. When I say elements, it may be something as simple as one loop, a second continuous noise, and a third performed element. Pimmon lets his little animals run where they may - or he lets his Sleeping Birds lie. Loops spin until they get out of synch with the music, then get back into it again; underpinning rhythms jerk like involuntary muscular spasms, induced by tiny electrified needles applied to pressure points. Melodies almost happen; they are suggested by negative spaces in the music. A form of excitement for the listener is almost generated, as she perceives the intelligence behind these extreme abstractions. The sparks of cold warmth may make you fall out of your sedan chair on the way to the chemist.

These 11 tracks all exhibit Pimmon's considerable skills and his attention to surface detail, although we never hear a single texture that's too violent or extreme. It's a peaceable album, I suppose - and the childlike innocence of the cover art contributes, as do the lovely track titles such as 'Bird Cage Circus', 'Sleeping Bird's Dream', 'Feather Prophet' and 'Voice of Sleeping Bird'. Sleep, birds, dreams...we might almost be reading titles of paintings by the Spanish surrealist, Joan Miró who like other surrealists, found poetry and mystery in the miraculous life of birds, never free from the chains of the sky. Pimmon certainly tends to his exotic aviary with love and care, but in the final analysis his music is resistant to much interpretation, and those titles (though charming) may not have much deep significance.

ED PINSENT 21/10/2002

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sirr.ecords@clix.pt
www.sirr-ecords.com

Gert-Jan Prins / Peter van Bergen / Fennesz
Dawn
GERMANY GROB 427 CD (2002)

Sorry to tell you that here's *another* crucial slab of modern electronica that you can't live without! Realised as part of the Total Music Meeting Festival in Berlin, 2000, and it's brilliant. A single 41 minute track of meandering through tasty clouds of burzoid textures, wriggles, blue sheets, static noise, breath-beats, shimmering stretches, drain-o-guzzles, shots, vibratos, hums, chords, snakes...and so forth.

Concocted using the familiar cooking implements in the sound kitchen - sampling, electronics, radio, computers, EWI and wind instruments....but most importantly, no editing! It was part of a bigger 'project' called 'Violence and Precision'. But no violence here at all really. I can't tell you how much I appreciate the 'relaxed' feel of it all - no urgent beats, no throbbing noise, no confrontational blastery - just a leisurely stroll through a strange and fascinating underground cavern bedecked with precious jewels, a forest / bedroom / shopping mall / village / urban sprawl / mental landscape all rolled into one, or three.

Composer-improviser Peter van Bergen supplies the occasional sax toot in this melange-a-trois, and he has appeared in the Ensemble LOOS and played with Wolfgang Fuchs and Georg Graewe. Gert-Jan Prins plays electronics and FM modulations - perhaps using a gigantic crystal set. Check out his solo CD *Prins Live* on Grob. Christian Fennesz is the Mego and MIMEO superstar who should one day be sponsored by manufacturers of the G4, but probably won't be. *Dawn* is reckoned by the label that released it to be some sort of new benchmark of excellence in improvised music statements, realised by artists not normally associated with that 'scene' - 'via their strictly electronic thinking, these musicians break away from the approach on musical material developed within free improvisation in the last 40 years,' runs the official line. It's certainly a grand exploration within a musical language - three intelligent sharpsters meet on the street corner, state clearly what's on their minds using chosen voice-boxes, then challenge each other to a zip-gun contest before provocatively twirling their 20-foot watch chains at the passing dames. All dressed in snappy zoot-suits, of course. Looovely raggedy-edged clatterings result from this encounter. A truly 'discursive' record, and you know how much you love them that way. All of our 'Dawns' should be this exciting - but then, the more music like this you hear, the more your soul will be 'new every morning'.

ED PINSENT 21/11/2002

Alter Kölner Str 10, D-40699 Erkrath, Germany
www.churchofgrob.com

Olivier Queysanne
Reperage Digital
FRANCE PRICILIA RECORDS P:REC 018 CD (2002)

Vicious, piercing, shrill noise. A lengthy endurance test with virtually no payoff.

ED PINSENT

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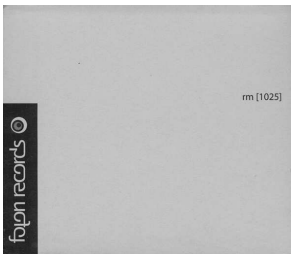

RM
1025
BELGIUM FOTON RECORDS 004 CD (2002)

Minimal.

ALASDAIR WILLIS

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Scanone
Electronic Lickfold EP
UNITED KINGDOM BLASE RECORDS NO NUMBER CD-R (2002)

Chilled out drum n bass derivative. I must have some kind of mental block when it comes to this kind of music. I can't even dislike it. Just leaves me blank. One destined for the waste-bin labelled 'DJ Culture'.

ALASDAIR WILLIS

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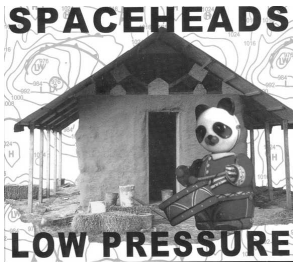

Spaceheads
Low Pressure
FRANCE BIP-HOP RECORDS BLEEP 14 CD (2002)

Cinematically-oriented coffee-table electronica.

Even if it does have chunks of 'real' instrumentation floating in its vaporous, perfumed miasm....oh God, I can't say I don't half-like it in some vague way, but I feel circumspect as I take a clear look: dub-lite; superannuated drum-loops shuffling away quietly so as not to offend anyone; cliché tic chord-sequences that seem, horridly, to reference Pink Floyd albums from the mid-eighteenth century by way of a million-year long Orb track; moreover, the inescapable discomfiture of tasting the cultural obsolescence seeping from the very pores of this deeply torpid (an)aesthetic. It's over, people: no-one believes in 'chill out' any more. It's been a long time since anybody other than the most encephalitic clubslut could be persuaded that Utopia (or Dystopia) was imminent by means of a crap breakbeat and the introduction of a different loop every sixteen bars, nobody cares for these E-comedown fantasies in 2003, fuck's sake this kind of music is sounding kinda fascist the longer it refuses to shut up and die...Don't mean to sound down on anyone's scene, it just grates my nerves; the sclerosis and the timidity, oh my niggaz....

Low Pressure is ok. These guys (it's a trumpet-drums duo) have been doing their thing for years and fair play, they've got their technique down- I enjoy the trumpet interjections, which although effete never stoop to campness: they serve to elucidate more clearly the syntax of the tracks (which might otherwise remain obscured by generic fixtures-and-fittings). Various guest remixers muck in, including Graham Massey from 808 State....not that you'd know the difference. But remixing is *de rigueur* in such circles, in keeping with the process-oriented nature of the music, and its reluctance to engage with death and finitude.

There's nevertheless something aimlessly pretty about these tracks that- Ahura Mazda help

me- I cannot deny, nor would wish to, any more than I might bark interrogation at a field of daisies. Pink and sentient like a very clean baby, but will this baby grow up to be Christ, Hitler, or the odiferous loony who always sits next to you on the bus? Trust nobody....I think what I'm trying to pinpoint here is the seduction of sentimentalism, the fist-shaped hegemony of nostalgia, the longing for an easy life....You might find *Low Pressure* (aren't there any other meteorological metaphors anyone could use? This one is overworked) imaginatively inspiring or sonically groundbreaking, and although I would have no choice but to vehemently disagree with you, we could probably stay friends so long as you didn't play it in my presence more than once every two or three years. After all, it's not unpleasant. You could do worse than sticking it on in the background while you're recovering from a serious illness (though do be sure recovery is a *fait accompli*- you wouldn't want to croak with this on, you'd be reincarnated as algae or one of those little birds that clean crap from the eyes of rhinoceri).

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Nad Spiro
Fightclubbing
GEOMETRIK / MESS/AGE GR - M/A 01 CD (2002)

Barely adequate this - a one-girl show, Rosa Arruti, noted musician and performer in Spain, with producer-collaborator Victor Sol in a New York studio. She bleats out a wimpy and weedy collection of beat-driven tracks made out of 'virtual sequenzes, rhythms and synths, guitar, loops and voice'. She sounds remote and bored when she sings, and that makes me bored too. The music she fashions is equally lacklustre and unengaging. Lacking in tension, the tracks may have the odd firework or two in the middle but are mostly shapeless, with neither beginning nor end to let you know that something has transpired. There's a lot of additional 'clever' baggage, like when she uses the term 'decodeenigmohelix / fightclubbingfiles' to prefix her shopping list of sampled sources. Perhaps this gobbledegook is intended to make some kind of ironic comment on the whole bizniss of techno and sampling music, but even a mouldy old fig like myself (who doesn't really understand this area at all) can sense it's all rather old hat for 2002. This is in spite of her claims for novelty - 'new delivery of encrypted soundtrack', she boasts, along with 'microfiles of inner electronics to create new sound-fictions'. She has one or two potentially good ideas going here, but she can't seem to make them work for her. Not entertaining music, nor does it fully meet its own artistic aspirations.

ED PINSENT 07/11/2002

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Staalplaat Soundsystem
Sweet Sissy and the Ballroom Hiss
THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT STMCD 022 3" CD (2002)

Not much of interest to be found in this document of a sound installation. The effort of wiring up heaps of domestic appliances and DJ equipment is lost on this unremarkable CD.

ALASDAIR WILLIS

PO Box 11453, 1001GL, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
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Joel Stern
Unplugged / Jodphur
UNITED KINGDOM TWOTHOUSANDAND 2++4 CD (2002)

Interesting - a not-unpleasant segment of chattery, clangy and twittering noise from this Australian artist, based in London just now. He loves both concrète sounds and free improvisation and indeed is capable of generating some fairly convincing concrète noises in a free way, with great facility. One envisages a leaping mime in a black outfit, flying from wall to wall in a very athletic way, inside a crooked house where the wiring for the lighting is completely screwy - sparks fly, the lights dim, the emergency generator outside whines like a dynamo. Stern is also quite good at delivering the 'rattling marbles' sound effect which many sound artists do so well - I can't figure out how, and suspect it's a trade secret. Francois Bayle did it once by putting a lot of steel ball-bearings in a big bucket, but this release seems a tad more low-budget than that.

In fact, most of it is realised with unconventional music-making objects (like cutlery, stones and paper) all amplified with contact mics and varied with a little computer treatment. Overall, Stern's work may be a little shapeless but does have some nice moments of sonic collision along the way; it has the feel of a very domestic / interior work, no external influences permitted. What the work lacks in tension, it makes up for with its stimulating textures. Also, it isn't overly 'computery', which is a boon in the age of control-freak soundfile manipulation. Bizarre packaging - an arty faded photo stuck on a black card sleeve, and held together with gaffer tape. Disorganised, rambling, charming.

ED PINSENT 21/11/2002

4 Old Castle Street, London E1 7NT, UK
www.twothousandand.com

Twine
Recorder
FRANCE BIP-HOP RECORDS BLEEP 11 CD (2002)

Twine give great quote: website hits us with Cage, Stockhausen, Nietzsche, Borges, and this beauty from Paul D. Miller, aka the darling of what a few years ago *The Wire* was calling 'illbient' (now now, straight face), DJ Spooky ('tha subliminal kid', no less):

'Recombinant potential. It has as a central feature a eugenics of the imagination. Each and every source sample is fragmented and bereft of prior meaning- kind of like a future without a past. The samples are given meaning only when re-presented in the assemblage of the mix.'

Leaving aside for a moment the mammoth hubris inferred in this remark (and the necromantic echo-chambers of dub smugness haunted by cloned soundwraiths), let's tiptoe rapidly across the quicksands of poststructuralist theory and attempt a sensual appreciation of this sonic body, presented to us as it is in sober greys and browns, offered in satiation of our hunger with the accompanying riddle- 'Is it microsound, ambient, IDM....or all?'. I wouldn't know, but the rhetoric suggests the correct answer would be 'containing elements of all, even as it transcends genre boundaries'- at least, that's what I tell people when they ask me if my stuff is really glam, freakbeat or shoegazing...

The eight tracks included herein *do* offer some variety, character, atmosphere and surprise, even if as a whole it's a little homogenous and wears somewhat thin across the duration of the CD. Greg Malcolm and Chad Mossholder (Twine) are clearly skilled and imaginative studio *auteurs* who know their way around a mouse, and there's enough of an understanding of aesthetics at work here to elevate Twine above the morass of contemporary laptop-slags. *Recorder* does actually sound as if it was made to be listened to by human beings bearing *some* relationship to those whose sensibilities were formed prior to 1995. Textural and rhythmic invention, when they occur, aren't made to seem like concessions made or piss taken: this isn't polemical music, thank God. Do I even detect a kind of circuit-board spirituality at work here? Wouldn't want to be projecting my own organic fantasies, but I must confess to feeling that by track 8, 'There Is No One Else', that there definitely is someone else, and perhaps they were there all along, watching. Languid, somnambulistic, it evokes the tombs of Plantagenet kings.

While this is the maturest track for me, there are other standouts which maybe fall short of

evoking such a tangible sense of atmosphere and stillness but which nevertheless paint some astonishing scenes in very muted colours, working a narrow palette but (it's the old story) finding a strength in limitation. We move between a kind of *film noir* vibe ('None Some Silver') into LSD deserts where purple sand-dunes undulate under a livid blue sun ('Cign'), the passage between images made smooth and dreamlike by the discreetly liquid blankets of electronica flowing between tracks- sometimes creamy, sometimes viscous, always *in process*. The implication of a violence exists (although at no point is it made explicit), perhaps most convincingly on 'Curved' which presents itself as a spiral structure in which matter accrues around a revolving core of seraphic fire. Or maybe I prefer 'Touched' (I love these inversely-portentous single-syllable titles!) for its humour- dry enough to make Steely Dan come off like Roy 'Chubby' Brown, I find an exultant freedom in a groove blanker than Richard Hell's entire career, like idiot tabla hammered by faggot deities.

It won't change your life: it hasn't changed mine: it's done with some skill and kind of good to have around I guess, but I wouldn't want to live here or die here or really imagine that this music is in any way pivotal to the future of human endeavour and the fulfilment of our collective destiny on Earth. It's not meant for the big picture: enjoy its miniaturism for what it is, a coloured toy with smooth surfaces. No shame in that.

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Various Artists

Delay Makes Me Nervous

AUSTRIA KARATE-JOE RECORDS KJ006 CD (2002)

Delay makes me nervous too, and thankfully there's little of it here. Too many musicians (myself included) swathe their music in the most overused of effects, but it doesn't seem to be this lot's bag. This various musicians featured on this compilation are all involved with the Vienna Institute of Electroacoustics and most of them have gone far beyond simple application of digital effects in their exploration of how computers can process environmental sounds.

Most people who've used the Internet will know the noise a computer modem makes when it logs on, thanks to the manufacturers amplifing it for us. In Florian Bogner's 'umgebung_0.2' he could be highlighting some of the other processes going on within your PC - the sound of your email being downloaded, or your computer porn collection being examined by the police, for instance. At the other extreme of the electroacoustic scale, Oliver Grimm's 'driveby' sounds like an untouched environmental recording, one you could use to convince yourself that there's a waterfall in your wardrobe.

Srob's 'kwatsch' (my favourite track) links the two base elements of electroacoustic music the most vividly, conjuring up an image of a haunted house that's been somehow wired up to the mains. Creaky doors open, setting off loud static crackles which activate nearby windup toys. Outside you listen to cicadas chirruping for a couple of blissful minutes whilst electronic wind gongs knock together occasionally on the porch. And then the peace is disturbed as the lord of the manor fires up his lawnmower for a late night survey of his territory, and the hired help starts to chop down the neon trees that line the garden.

Another highlight is Gilbert Handler taking us into John Butcher territory during 'deka dent (one special day in the dungeon)' as he impersonating a madman in his prison cell, talking to himself in gulps and gurgles whilst drips of water echo around him.

Unfortunately some of the music here is downright retro - Viewnix's 'zero generalizability' with its sampled speech and mellifluous synth lines could be straight off an 80s Adrian Sherwood sampler. And I really lost patience with the plodding electro pop (complete with sleazy German voice) that ends the CD.

But to get the best out of the rest of this disc, you need to play it loud to hear all the details. Keep the volume dial within reach though, as when you get to Thermodynamic Superstar & His Gardeners' 'Playing: bluter! (my god is a drummer)', you may find that random bleeps jump out of your speakers and shake your house by its foundations. I guess this track exemplifies what people refer to as 'laptop music': a rapid and random procession of familiar sounds divorced from their original contexts, cut up and processed with no apparent guiding principle other than the intention to disorientate you and prevent your senses from determining any narrative thread. In fact, the closest that you'll find to a recurring motif on this CD is that of sounds being brought to your attention, only to be cut off just as you've noticed them - it's like standing on a giant tower of rugs and having them pulled from under your feet in quick succession.

It's hard to determine the methods used by any of the musicians here (which is surely part of the appeal). The tracks don't seem to be composed as such. There's no particular form, not even an organic structure. Neither are the performances as tight, disciplined or purposeful as you'd expect from committed improvisers - stunningly beautiful moments are followed by plenty of uneventful ones. It's as if you're surreptitiously listening in on the musicians for a few minutes while they 'do what they do', like an ornithologist taping birdsong. Which makes it an enjoyable, if somewhat ephemeral, experience.

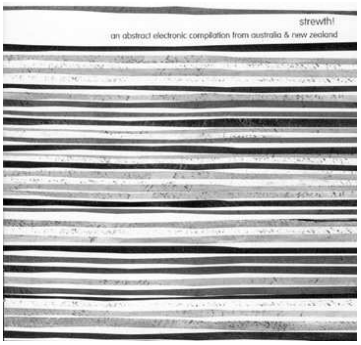
HARLEY RICHARDSON

www.karate-joe.at

Various Artists

Strewth! An abstract electronic compilation from Australia and New Zealand

AUSTRALIA SYNAESTHESIA SYN002 CD (2002)



As the subtitle indicates, this is a survey of various Australian and NZ electronic acts, some of whom may be already familiar to TSP readers (for example Rosy Parlane), others of whom will be very unknown and still others who are known but usually not associated with abstract electronic or computer music (Oren Ambarchi and Darrin Verhagen). The 18 tracks range from frisky bleep-bloops (many of the early pieces, especially those by Delire and Auigiugui) to more serious-minded forays into atmosphere, space and structure (many of the later tracks). Particularly impressive is Cray's 'untitled I/O' (sic) which sounds menacing, steely and concentrated at times, and sprays tonnes of tiny shards of noise about - it's probably the most

distinctive piece on the CD and easily one of the best. For Mego fans (because Mego is the distributor for the CD, there's got to be a Mego kind of track in there somewhere), Squinch offers a very restless, clanking mayhem called 'mono inertia and the last utility'. The noisy, party-going 1st half of the CD out of the way, from here on the territory broadens into ambient soundscapes with a corresponding expansion in the variety of sound and structure, starting with Oren Ambarchi's crystalline 'kozel' which is not greatly different from his guitar work (and for that reason it's a distinctive and easily recognisable track) but very lovely and pleasing to the ear nonetheless. Dion Workman offers a steady tone poem, Netochka Nezvanova dons a spacesuit to go exploring outside her sonic craft and David Franzke and Rosy Parlane bring up the rear with low key, thoughtful pieces that demand your time and concentration.

There's something for everyone on this release and the wealth of talent is such that you don't even miss the people who might be expected to appear on this CD but don't (Gary Bradbury, Minit, Pimmon, Quockenzocker, Snawklor to name a few). It is funny that we have a few well known musicians on this CD who hardly need any introduction from me mingling with a lot of unknowns (some of whom have actually been active for a long time) but I guess a CD featuring just unknown people wouldn't sell as well. Anyway, time for another pat on the back for Mr Synaesthesia himself, the one and only Mark Harwood aka DJ Quockenzocker (hope I spelt that right for once - I've called him a fair few variations in the past) for this release; as Cray himself remarks in the credits on his CD 'Undo', what better place in Melbourne to hang out at than the Syn-shop though I confess I haven't been down to Melbourne in the last 12 years so I'll have to get down there and see the S place for myself.

JENNIFER HOR

Synaesthesia, www.synrecords.com
Mego (manufacturer / distributor), www.mego.at

Various Artists
Sul: Dedicated to Chris Marker
PORTUGAL SIRR.ECORDS SIRR 2006 CD
(2002)

Excellent! The best tribute album to Chris Marker ever recorded! (Although Phil Manzanera's *Listen Now* LP might come close, by default). Seven bleeding-edge sound artistes were invited to contribute and - although some tracks are so minimal they're on the verge of disappearing into the same solar wind that brought them here - every recording has substance and weight, conveying effective semi-cinematic atmospheres, and the whole CD is the exact opposite of lazy, non-specific 'Ambient' music. Of course Marker's cinema work is, like all the best things, rather hard to come by; I've only ever seen the 'famous' one *La Jetee*, and that was aired mainly because of its connection to the Terry Gilliam movie *Twelve Monkeys*. But suffice it so say the Marker man is a true 'maverick' of narrative schemas, transcending genres as easily as he works across multi-media formats. 'Chris Marker is a sculptor of memory', states Atau Tanaka, speaking of this French-born film director, photographer and writer whose output includes *Sans Soleil* and *Level Five*. 'He can make us reminisce of things we have never lived, to remember places we have never been'.

Some of these non-existent things and places - mostly very alien - are made real here, on the musical excursions created with great care and attention by the seven sound-artists hereon, using abstract noise, tonal washes, grubby static and other methods. Atau Tanaka's 'Rail' is a monorail journey into Ballard-esque zone of no return; a bleak quest, referencing Tarkovsy's *Stalker* as much as Marker. Eric La Casa's 'L'air au fond du rouge' depicts strange atmospheric conditions on globe, threatening weather ahead...Marc Behrens, with 'Khabul rubble', depicts ghostly zone...thin feet on broken ice, edging towards ruined city. Vitriol uses sound of water and suggests strange aquatic trip across silvery lake, with unexpected outcome. Pimmon's 'Shadow, Shade' is visit to nightmarish hospital, observing scanning machine at work. i.d. uses interrupted radio signals from space and much heavy static; messages never decoded. Oren Ambarchi brings album to blissful close as astronaut slips into suspended animation and seals self in cryogenic chamber. But then threatening signal appears on life-support readout..ambiguous downbeat ending, fully in keeping with Marker spirit.

A remarkable record this, one that indicates sirr is becoming a notable presence - this should be reckoned as a diamond release in their catalogue. Not simply a celebrity 'name-checking' exercise (such as inviting big name artistes to cover the songs of Captain Beefheart), the sound-artists here are totally sympathetic; each one genuinely attempting to engage with the singularity of Marker's work, and largely succeed in paying an appropriate homage, if not expanding the scope of his agenda across into a musical platform. A more low-key, ambiguous version of what Heldon's music is to Philip K Dick. Like Marker, each work starts in the realms of science fiction area, but winds up asking heavy questions about the nature of human existence, probing those metaphysical depths...do not miss this release, cybernauts all, 'tis a real Space Odyssey for 2002-2003!

ED PINSENT 20/11/2002

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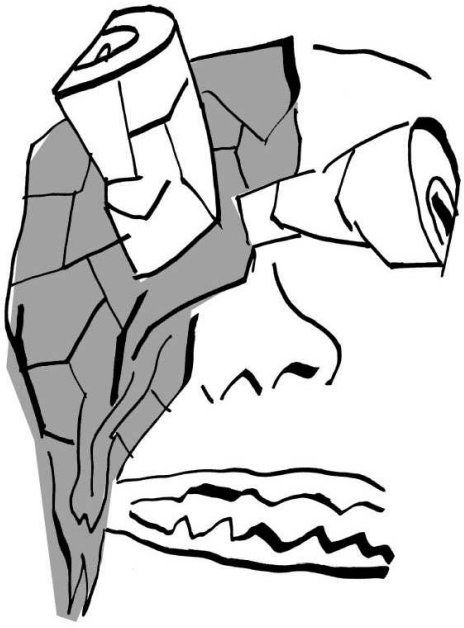
More Electronic Music, but made specifically with computers, is to be found in MUTATING INTO A MICROCHIP



ENGLISHNESS WHAT PRICE?

I DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND

The Bohman Brothers
A Twist for All Pockets
ITALY ROSSBIN RS003 CD (2002)

The first I think full-length release to be credited to both the UK's Bohman Brothers - and an excellent tour de force of twisted, noisey splurge it be. Of the two, Adam Bohman is slightly more well known than his brother Jonathan, through performing with the art-combo Morphogenesis, and releasing a solo cut on Paradigm's *Variations* - somehow he also managed to release an entire solo record on that label called *Music and Words* , where he indulged his unique diary technique using his hand-held cassette recorder to tape daily sound events, and his mumbling commentary on them. He's even appeared briefly with *Sound Projector* fave Rev Dwight Frizzell. Marginal isn't in it!

To begin with, The Bohman Brothers may come across as owners of a sonic vegetable allotment - they deal in organic, raw, earthy sounds, scraping the earth off home-grown produce. They use anything and everything to produce sound, mostly home-made implements of one kind or another. Just look at their shopping list of tools - prepared violin, home-made stings, objects, rubber-bands, rods, cones, hosepipe, feedback piano, and 'sundries'. The duo are mainly interested in sound as sound - exhibiting virtually zero interest in making conventional music, rather they're concerned with weaving an elaborate carpet, or piecing together a mosaic, of eclectic sound sources. Cabbage leaves are stretched like elastic flaps and pulled until they snap. Agricultural farm implements are abused in strange ways. Try their home-made apple wine - it's lethal. At times slow and ponderous, some of the music here is like hearing the Bohman parts of Morphogenesis without the other five clowns getting in the way. But other tracks are alarming, fast-moving, and brilliantly scatty - especially those which abuse tapes and electronics in a very impolite way.

This maltreatment of electronics is particularly noteworthy and extremely refreshing - they possess a very English, and very healthy, lack of respect for what electronic devices can do. Rather, they want to know what *they* can do to abuse electronic devices, to make them work in the Bohman way. They are the Barnes-Wallis inventors of music. These are fine tapes from the library, some live tapes - dating from 1998 and 1999 - maybe there are more in the archive, awaiting release. One of them is binaural, requiring headphone listening. Liam Stefani, the owner of the old Scatter label, is thanked. The utter disjointedness of the long track 'Oneiro', weighing in at an impressive 20:27, is especially appealing. It is bitty and disconnected in the extreme, yet eventually it does coalesce, and even so it remains elusive...like trying to capture a swarm of one million bees in a tiny jar. Just great. Gareth Parkes provides some of these warped electronics on another cut, 'A Marigold from Probability'. And Rob Nutt chips in some valuable tapes of factory sounds on two tracks. Again, these contributions are effortlessly and seamlessly integrated, once brought within the orbit of the Bohman universe.

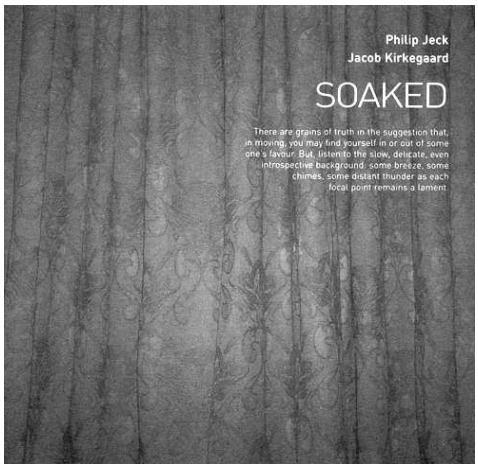
I hope I haven't used the word 'eccentric' yet. I have briefly met both the Bohman brothers now and again, and they are warm and wonderful human beings who do many positive, active things in the London improvisation scene - helping others as well as themselves, and staying out of the spotlight. The only thing I slightly regret about this otherwise fine Italian release is the abstract sleeve art, which conveys little of the 'Alchemist's Workshop' aspect of the Bohman methodology, or their personalities. They may work directly out of the potting shed, but what they end up with on the final recorded product is every bit as good as Luciano Berio and David Tudor put together. More power to this family.

ED PINSENT 09/11/2002

Via Gozzano 1, 10098 Rivoil (TO), Italy
rossbin@libero.it

Philip Jeck
Stoke
UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TO:56 CD (2002)

Jeck, Lord of the 'art' turntable, Duke of the Dynaflex and Denizen of the Dansette, hits town with his latest worn vinyl-fest, all 'edits' captured from his international live performances. Seven honey-drenched and richly saturated tracks spread thickly over 53:32 minutes. As always, here be lots of loops, lots of layers, lots of chance events creating fortuitous musical moments, yet Jeck always leaves his fingerprints on every second. Voices and musics are set off in constant circles, yet never quite repeating the same patterns twice over. Distressed surface noise also becomes a part of the overall tableau, and is transformed into sweet music. Ambiguity turns into certainty, as Jeck forces the hand of chance.


Philip Jeck
Jacob Kirkegaard
SOAKED
There are grains of truth in the suggestion that, in moving, you may find yourself in or out of some one's favour. But, listen to the slow, delicate, even introspective background: some breeze, some chimes, some distant thunder as each focal point remains a lament.

'A glimpse of the future through prisms of past records,' is how The Wire describes his work; I like the idea that you can see the future through listening. Perhaps Jeck is a magus, casting the runes, throwing the Tarot or spinning the I Ching, with all the mastery of a mystic adept. The chance shuffles of his vinyl Tarot deck will always reveal a credible configuration of future events...he releases all the untapped energy of a precognitive dream. His loops and repeats will send you into a trance, in which state you will babble in tongues and reveal the secrets of the world beyond.

Jeck speaks of 'the combination of a half-remembered noise and the nostalgia of a room..expressing the thoughts that at one time slip into every home.' Like *Soaked*, this CD is heavy on nostalgic experiences and sad, weepy evocations of loss and tragedy. 'Pax' is a real standout cut here, with its trembling, slowed-down voice moaning against an organ music backdrop, and is probably one of the most affecting things you'll hear, enabling contact with a buried part of your own humanity you had thought was long lost. Then again, 'Below' has a slightly more aggressive edge, a chaotic centre that might result from the tension of doing it live. Oddly, though, it's hard to imagine Jeck's private and intimate work in the arena of a public venue. The recorded results always seem to be beyond mass communications, instead speaking to the listener directly.

ED PINSENT 21/11/2002

www.touch.demon.co.uk

Philip Jeck / Jacob Kirkegaard

Soaked

UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TONE 15 CD (2002)

What price your Englishness, o listener dwelling in this sceptred isle? Learn the answer on this, another essential Jeck release, this time with added electronic assistance from effects-collaborator Jacob Kirkegaard. Recorded live at a music festival, this is a short work which delivers strong emotional content inside a condensed package - along with the usual breathtaking eeriness that Jeck has made all his own, working exclusively with his collections of old records and barely-functioning turntables. His previous released works - all grand statements, which I recommend - have tended to allow layers of sound to accumulate through the natural process of setting several turntables to spin simultaneously. This new release, though, is more stripped down, intensely focussed on certain particular goals, and creates an effective multi-levelled scenario with only a few elements. The sparing use of echo and other electronic affects, added with tremendous sympathy by Kirkegaard, contribute enormously. I'd guess these men are two well-matched players - taciturn, lean, saying no more than needed.

My perception is that *Soaked* depicts a vague theme - and offers glimpses of this in flickering, faded sonic images. A sad rainy day in England. Children and an old dark schoolhouse. A sad child's prayer and a song, rendered here with extreme poignancy by a wobbly old record, the voice of its devotional owner so attenuated and wretched it evokes a wealth of complex emotions. A clunking rhythm of a stuck record which evolves into a train ride through a dreary landscape. The atmosphere is muffled, wet and miserable. A Victorian music box (ref track 4) sings from the past. Nostalgia and faded hopes haunt all the lost souls in this world, their only voice a plaintive squeak and a sigh. *Soaked* could only be an English recording, a hymn to the Everyman English citizens, generations who have endured 1000 years of wet weather, to the point where bad weather has seeped into our collective bones and interminably dampened our spirits and dashed our hopes. You can smell the wet raincoats, the umbrellas, the wet dogs. I gather Jeck is not a critical artist who hates the inanities of the modern world, but rather a man who is profoundly saddened by it all - the ignorance and the poverty of spirit that has doomed the English for generations. The muffled and indistinct sounds of this record match our emotionally stunted, pinched and repressed nature...*Soaked* can hold up a true mirror to this segment of our psyche.

After 5 or 6 segments of moping around with a gloomy expression, *Soaked* becomes heavier and quite pro-active towards the end - a robotic war machine clattering along a metal tunnel and knocking holes in brick walls, throwing off sparks and danger. But this is but an episode - a man may resolve to throw off the melancholy of wet and gloomy England, but his courage soon fails, and in his final moments he trundles away to an inconclusive ending, with perhaps a church bell sounding in the distance.

ED PINSENT 29/10/2002

www.touch.demon.co.uk

V/VM abducted by SHAKEY

The Green Door

UNITED KINGDOM V/VM TEST RECORDS OFFAL 04 CD (ND)

A collection of darkly witty and subversive texts, this one organised around a spoof 'narrative' involving Shakin Stevens and the Green Door. Wherever the 'normals' appear, be it through TV or popular song, V/VM are there with a counter-attack...their work corrodes the force of the enemy by attacking his music - Dad-music, safe and parent-friendly music. The Birdie Song, TV theme music like Bergerac, Cannon and Ball's comedy record, Lionel Ritchie - all are correctly identified as evil cancers and, one by one, are clinically assassinated by the V/VM collective. Up against the wall, mo-fos!

Just as *Aural Waffle* ☛managed to locate more obscure versions of 'Mouldy Old Dough' than you want to know about, this release has tracked down not a few horrendous cover versions of Shakin Stevens songs, including 'This Ole House' sung by children...ghastly...there is something creepy about inducing children who clearly can't sing to make a record, and somehow it affirms the smug family-life values that have haunted British society since Victorian times. These are the very values V/VM are out to smash. In fact, not just Dad-music but Grandad-music comes under attack too, with the opening version of an old World-War I era song, delivered in truly cornball style and probably ripped off from some nameless 'party' LP for old codgers. Probably stolen from the same source as the piano-version of 'The Birdie Song'.

This decaying, bourgeois culture is seen by V/VM as a species of disease, on which they wage war using two powerful weapons - juxtaposition, and misuse of technology. The juxtaposition of so many kitsch sources is done with steely precision, the entire package coming on like a sarcastic verison of a Party LP from hell. The technology is used to ruthlessly mutate the songs into ghastly replicas of themselves - filters, modulators, wrong speeds, repeats and CD skips, and heavy distortion. All of these rely on our memory of the original to function - the 'Butcher All Night' version of 'All Night Long' being a case in point, where a crazy-house image of Lionel Ritchie keeps surfacing out of a cauldron of evil sonic murk, much like the dying T-1 android at the end of *Terminator II*. What's even more effective is the version of 'Jim Bergerac' where the jaunty accordion melody is fed through a ring modulator to produce an off-kiltre, detuned version of itself, totally out of step with the backing track. Something bland and familiar is remade into a satanic, evil anthem - there's a lot of subversive power in this, besides the black humour. Fittingly for another 'butcher' classic, it ends with the repellent sound of pigs squealing at a slaughterhouse. Not for the faint-hearted.

ED PINSENT 09/11/2002

www.brainwashed.com/vvm

Various Artists

V/VM Test Records present

AuralOffalWaffleTenPintsOfBitterAndABagOfPorkScratchings

UNITED KINGDOM V/VM TEST RECORDS OFFAL 01 2 x CD (1999)

What price your English face? Let this smelly slab of cheesy insanity rip off your features. As I attempt to 'come to terms' with the sheer abrasiveness of the V/VM universe, I'd like to outline 12 proposals which would form the basis of the 'essay' I have yet to write in singing the praises of this anti-collective...I've no doubt that doing so is as pretentious as reading *Viz Comic* and discerning the Rabelaisian undertones expressed in the thought balloons. But I don't care. For information, this masterpiece was 'compiled, butchered, hacked and edited by James Kirby'. Butcher away, JK.

1. They use virtually the same methods, and aim at the same targets, as Frank Zappa did when he started out his career. They also aim to be ten times as annoying as FZ. This debut release was, without a doubt, an *Absolutely Free* for the late 20th century UK audience. The 'squares' this time around are anybody and everybody who's ever watched BBC 1 for entertainment and swallowed the whole package unthinkingly. And like poor innocents, they are ruthlessly massacred.

2. A release like this could only be British. Only a British audience would get the jokes. International listenership will enjoy the surface of the wildly-distorted effects of every other track, but only someone who remembers the 1970s and (say) The Basil Brush show will get the full ghastly effect. Shudder.

3. V/VM embrace cheesiness, tacky vulgarity and cringe-making tat with the unyielding dedication of a terrier. I mean, how many versions of 'Mouldy Old Dough' can possibly exist?! Answer - an awful lot! V/VM have found every single one of them, and intend to inflict them all on us. Including a brass band version. No kidding. 'As for Mouldy old Dough, its the anthem of the record industry,' reports Andrew MacGregor, the Animal of V/VM. 'It's all very stale bread and we've known this for a time.'

4. These clowns must have heard Radio One tuned slightly off-station on a crappy transistor for longer than any man can stand. This unpleasant fact of British life (evidenced at seaside towns, factories, etc) has informed their wild distorto-aesthetic.

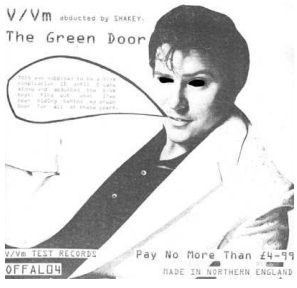
5. They would like to perceive what they do as a virus. Maybe so, but the virus began on 1970s TV.

6. They aim for a form of musical vomit, and musical stink. The intention here (and with all the releases) is to be as obnoxious as possible. Somehow it still falls short. For me at any rate. I was shocked for about five minutes. Now I love the freekin stuff.

7. People Like Us - with whom bills have been shared I think - is the 'acceptable face' of V/VM. To put it another way, V/VM are the 'id' of People Like Us.

8. In between day-glo played-back wobbly versions of truly horrible records, they can generate an avant-noise (step forward Jansky Noise) that's genuinely interesting and good. Maybe they think the jokey context invalidates any art aspirations and lets them off the hook.

9. 'There's a guy works down the chip shop swears he's Merzbow'. How 'knowing'. This joke title is the kind of marginal send-up that maybe 100 people in the audience will 'get'. Bill Griffith, the cartoonist of Zippy The Pinhead, did an entire strip where he obsessed neurotically about making such obscure references that only a small elite would appreciate them. He should worry.



10. Viv Stanshall, I make no less bold a claim, would have loved these guys. Like him, they have seen fit to immortalise the crass idiocy of bad advert jingles. One day, the advert for British Beef will be cherished as something as timeless as the ancient slogan 'This is boredom you can afford, buy Cyril Lord!' (See The Bonzos, 'I'm Bored' from the *Gorilla* LP).

11. What this record does to the unbearable song 'What a Wonderful World' guarantees that they must be instantly awarded a huge cash payment for a life-long public service.

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ED PINSENT 03/11/2002

www.brainwashed.com/vvm

NIGHTMARES AND PENUMBRA

DEATH, HELL, PAIN, WORLD OF PAIN "THIS IS HELL, NOR AM I OUT OF IT"

Doc Wör Mirran

The Soundtrack of Death

GERMANY MOLOKO + PLUS 056 CD (2002)

Probably the umpteenth release from this German industrial free-form lot, who comprise Joseph B Raimond and his sick buddies. They have been chuntering on since the 1980s and are bound to have dozens of obscure issues since I know not when; although *Odds, Sods and Dirtclods* was a 3-LP set of unreleased work on the American RRR label and was widely available for a time. 'This is the loudest, noisiest DWM recording to date', boasts the label, freely acknowledging that the band fall easily into the power electronics / old school industrial category. 'The perfect background music to die along to'. And to encourage us to think of it as a soundtrack, this is packaged in a metal film cannister.

Well, it certainly has no small degree of fatal power - and although not overtly moribund, the music is very Teutonic and 'heavy'. Each of the five cuts offers a different 'insight' into death, the causes of death, the experience of death, and the afterlife...'Muerte' for example features a distorted organ drone of evil dimensions, whose flow is interrupted by twittering sounds as of tiny winged phantoms fluttering around a derelict cathedral. 'Tot' is likewise slow and steady, its ominous and heavy buzzy synths glowering at you like large growling tigers. With its stately pace, this soundtrack clearly intends to lead the dance of the dead at a suitably funereal tempo. 'Death', the third track, is more alarming - a full mixed chord of electronic wailing in discordant manner, the voices perhaps of negative reverso-angels hovering in a black cloudy sky. 'We refuse the afterlife, thank you very much', DWM seem to be saying. 'Just allow us to rest in peace in this ruined old cemetery, and keep the company of worms.' A remarkably dense and semi-chaotic noise accompanies this gloomy thought.

Climax Golden Twins

Session 9: original score

USA MILAN ENTERTAINMENT INC 73138-35937-2 CD (2001)

A relatively high-profile release for this obscure-ish Seattle-based art combo - it's the soundtrack for a film by Brad Anderson and judging by the artwork and subtitle 'FEAR IS A PLACE', the movie is some sort of psychological horror exploration midway between *Blair Witch Project* and David Lynch...but we'll probably never see it on release in the UK. The CD release is an attempt by Milan Records to get in on the 'action', and they've helpfully included a cover sticker that describes the music as 'A panoply of bizarre sounds and creative explorations' and namecheck other artists such as Brian Eno, Philip Glass, Bill Laswell et al in the hopes of appealing to an established audience of buyers. In this instance, Climax Golden Twins just manage to slip between all of these cracks - this studio assemblage is fine work, if relatively conventional by their previous standards, and in places might be mistaken for 'Dark Ambient'. They use surface noise of old records, unusual instruments, a distant out-of-tune piano, indistinct drones and ominous rumbles, and subtle electronic effects and treatments. We have Scott Colburn to thank for the very polished professional surface; and all the creators exhibit a strong, imaginative approach to film music. It certainly isn't anything like 'scary music' that a normal Hollywood music editor would commission; it has more psychological depth, and one might hope that the movie itself has similar depth, and likewise diverges from conventional Hollywood norms. More than any other CGT release, the power of the music comes not from the playing / performances, but simply from the sounds they make, and how these sounds can be layered and pieced together with skill and ingenuity.

ED PINSENT 07/12/2002

www.sessionnine.com

Climax Golden Twins are interviewed this issue.

'Halal' is effectively World War one - explicitly so, with the sound of whistling shells, breaking glass and explosions all rendered through synthetic process. A surround-sound experience recreation fit for the Imperial War Museum; a relentless barrage of noise. All the cities are aflame. 'Dod' closes the CD on a strangely gloomy note - a factory pile-driver stamping on your body as it proceeds along the conveyor belt of death. Oppressive and the most openly 'industrial' cut on the disc, it suggests also that the entire soundtrack has a species of narrative, if you can be bothered to work it out. There is something rather numbing about listening to music like this; as though Doc Wör Mirran see death as an etherised corpse laying on a table in the morgue, or death as resulting from an overdose of morphine. Death as a solitary, lonely event that does no more than yield a harvest of white cadavers, rather than a collective tragedy that diminishes mankind. That said, this music is intelligent and comes at you with a dreadful clarity - it's far more open-eyed than most inward-looking Dark Ambient, or fuzzed-up and dumbed-down death metal. Recorded in 1997 and 1998, now unleashed for the hungry ears of its morbid audience.

ED PINSENT 08/12/2002

Gommemsche Str 7, 39245 Pretzien, Germany

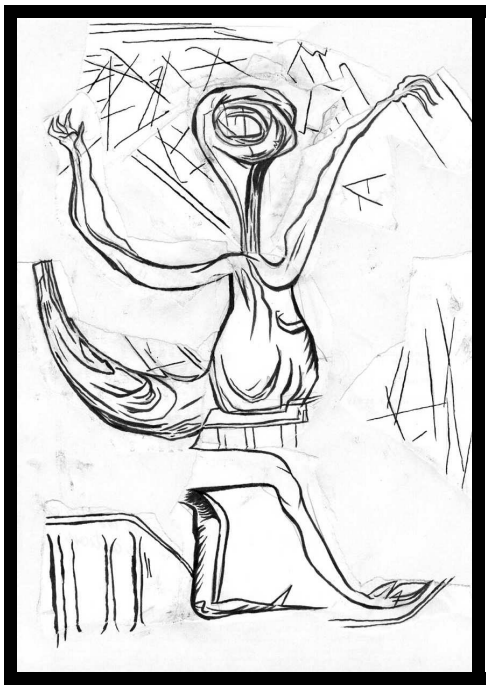
Kevin Drumm

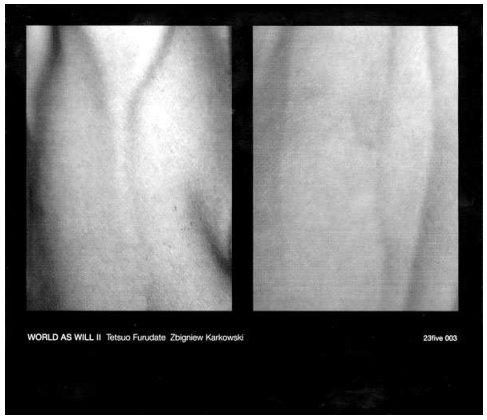
Sheer Hellish Miasma

AUSTRIA MEGO 053 CD (2002)

You just have to smile and roll your eyes a bit when you see this recording in its tasteful all-black cover with the artist's initials and the CD title in gold Gothic lettering, the descriptive track titles like 'the inferno' and Mego's advice to 'crank it!' Also when you start spinning the opener 'the turning point' with its puttering engine noises that turn into revving sounds and recall that in the Mego catalogue, Mego052 refers to the label's Formula One racing machine (well, they probably wish - it's really a motorised go-kart but for some things you gotta start small), you have to chuckle a bit. There must be a connection between Mego052 and Mego053 somewhere. Homage to racing cars and/or to all his favourite Metal bands and influences (I think one can safely say that many if not most fans of black metal and other extreme forms of Metal are people you read about in *The Wire*), Kevin Drumm's *Sheer Hellish Miasma* is not so much hellish or scary as a fun ride into what guitars + electronix can do for you when you turn them all the way to the max AND LET 'EM RIP!!!

For most people, the one track that'll most appeal is 'the inferno' but *Sheer Hellish Miasma* as the track titles indicate is best appreciated as one entire work with four very distinct movements. Having said that, I find the one track that stands out on its own is the second movement 'hitting the pavement': it's a sinuous slither of dense, cloudy noise, baring its fangs now and again, elegant and sexy and menacing all at once, excavating holes in your brain but always restrained behind bars so maybe some people will be disappointed that Drumm never unlocks the cage here. As for 'the inferno', it's more like a steady travelogue through the different parts of hell with their own sets of animals than the rollercoaster ride through different levels of fear that the CD title aspires to; the animals are out of the cage but they've forgotten what it's like to be really free so all they can do is snarl and roar a lot but not much else. What might have worked here would be to vary the speed and volume levels of the various noise and guitar-generated elements and the addition of a noisy background (in the style of Merzbow's sandstorms though not necessarily sounding the same) to unify the elements, give them more substance and tension and also be another element to play around with in terms of sound, pacing and texture. Yes, texture - I knew there was something missing in this track! Texture as in evil smirking schoolteachers running their claws down a giant blackboard or drag racers shredding tyres over rough stretches of bitumen! Without texture, 'the inferno' seems a little too smooth and mechanical so unfortunately we don't quite get the bile and brimstone nightmare we were promised.





At least Drumm believes in post-traumatic therapy so he lets us down and returns us to the cold light of day with 'cloudy', a quiet ambient piece with a little harsh buzz that decisively finishes off *Sheer Hellish Miasma*. Going without 'cloudy' would be like having dinner without dessert, the after-dinner mints, coffee and conversation, or having sex without the afterplay and the bit where the guy turns over and starts snoring; various consequences could ensue which you might regret for the rest of your life. (Ah, well, don't ask me what they might be.)

JENNIFER HOR

www.mego.at

Tetsuo Furudate / Zbigniew Karkowski

World as Will II

USA 23FIVE INCORPORATED 003 CD (2002)

As monumental a work of 'symphonic horror' as you'd expect from these two murderous titans of destructive noise and mayhem - it's awesome, ominous and terrifying, a dense and dark modern composition. What impresses me mainly is the very stark clarity of it all - unlike some gothic / industrial goons who cloak their activities in feedback, echo and distortion to cloak their lack of ideas, and wallow like swine in the mud of half-baked pessimism. Furudate and Karkowski, conversely, make their bleak statement with a frightening precision. To play this CD is like listening to two highly intelligent thinkers explaining, in painstaking detail, why the world is doomed and why all of mankind's endeavour is futile. Their arguments are worryingly convincing, even if you don't accept them.

Certes, intelligence and dynamics abound in these two long tracks - the first one recorded live, the second executed through the 'exchange of soundfiles' method so beloved of the modern musician who's too busy to book time in the studio, which is in any case becoming increasingly unnecessary. Not every moment of this music is unequivocally wonderful - there are, admittedly, some moments where the listener is enmired in aural sludge and weighed down by the drumbeats of doom, but mostly what we have here is a truly symphonic, through-composed approach to stark noise-terror. The more random elements of feedback and electronic howlage that have survived are very carefully controlled; these twin wild tigers are kept on the leash. Chants of abject misery, like the voices of oppressed slaves suffering under the cruel reign of Satan, are heard on the first cut; the second cut features martial trumpets and orchestral stabs, sampled from the musicians' own earlier works - every one of them a jolly romp, as you can tell from titles *Catastrophe*, *Kögler Strip* and *Life of Death*. And there's a sample from Wagner's *Götterdammerung*, hence I suppose the air of pompous grandeur that hangs over all like a purple velvet curtain.

The underlying philosophy that informs this weighty work is no less ponderous - based on one of the tenets of laugh-a-minute philosopher Schopenhauer. He had this theory that the only thing holding the world together is not love, (as the hippies would dream) but sheer willpower. While no warmongering advocate (apparently he didn't equate will to force), he certainly thought that moral behaviour was a waste of time and should be 'eschewed in favour of the will as the primal creative force, even at the inevitable price of existential pessimism'. Well, existential pessimism is

certainly what you get a cartload of here from these notorious Tokyo-based madmen. The ominous opening to this, the first release on the 23Five Incorporated label, leads to an ominous payoff - a climax of doom and horror. Probably not quite as monstrous as I'm making it sound though, and the lasting impression is certainly one of 'primal creative force' - which may be a good thing.

ED PINSENT 02/11/2002

www.23five.org

Teleform
Cosine f
SWITZERLAND DOMIZIL 16 CD (2001)

Enjoyable enough white-out from Teleform (his mum calls him Bernd Schurer), another branch on the near-infinite fir tree of northern European nanotech which reproduces itself digitally at a velocity unmatched by organic life, following the robot leaders toward an uncertain consummation- Blake's marriage of Heaven and Hell revisioned as a Philip K. Dick acid-paranoid mesh of silicon and gristle. That's right- eventually you'll stumble upon a website vending segments of your own consciousness on CDR, you'll check the shopping lists in dismay and find it's all there- jaded freaks in farflung barbarous outposts buying you in portions, for chin-stroking kicks. When this happens, look closer and you'll see no-one cares to differentiate between (on the one hand) your profoundest moments of insight / union with All-That-Is and (on the other hand) the perfect banality of your shaven-ape routines. It'll all be the same by then- the juicy nuances of the *hieros gamos* scorched and made binary; a digital codex usurping the lustrous rubies that gushed from your heart. Will you even recognise the information that was yours, that was you? Will you possess the technique necessary to shatter the encryptions that cube you? And how to restore a beautiful human chaos when all is subjugated under the jackboot-mathematics of Order?

Cosine F is the kind of record that provokes such questions in me, since it resembles nothing more than a field recording at the scene where the last human being is expiring- slowly, unremarkably, the brain-stem congeals and the little voices lose their coherence- memory flattens out and belongs, suddenly, to everyone- the ultimate alchemical *separatio* is effected as the strands of persona unweave and shake loose, as if a cruel and beautiful goddess were combing the knots from her black-hole hair. As I listened and tried to enter into this sepulchral experience, the uncompromising voidness of the 'music' (consisting as it does of little more than the barest of minimal drones, very quiet hissing and periods of near or complete silence) led me to draw parallels between this portrait of expiry-in-solitude and what some perceive to be the colonisation of the soul by ratiocinative modes of 'controlling' reality through systemisation (eg capital vs. value, the new media vs. the living tradition, bling vs. do-what-thou-wilt-shall-be-the-whole-of-the-Law, interactivity vs. conscientious objection and / or rioting), which in turn became a meditation on to what extent it would be possible for this systemisation to shrink and atrophy the *logos* of soul, what this would mean for generations to come, and how this user-friendly genocide would be packaged and sold for consumption (like everything else).

I conclude that this is, in all senses, an eschatological recording, and whatever resonance it possesses it draws from its relationship to endings, terminations and the many-levelled death: personal death, cultural death, species death, the slow heat-death of our universe through the accretion of entropy. Either this, or Bernd Schurer has chronic tinnitus and this is, in fact, a tremendously frank and moving account of his struggle with fucked ears. To tell you what it 'sounds like' would be to play charades with this man's tragedy, and I don't want that on my conscience. Goodnight.

JONATHAN HELLIER

www.domizil.ch

Ultra
Lifestyle
USA DOM AMERICA / THE AJNA OFFENSIVE ANJA 05 CD (2001)

Ultra
Stain
USA DOM AMERICA DOM US CD 12 CD (2002)

Two records from a 'cult' American trio who are new to me, but appear to have been making records since 1987 - the core members are R Stanford King, Wes Weresch (ie Wesley Mark) and Jon Carlson. On *Stain / La Mancha*, they're joined by six collaborators including Sean Hollister, Brad Anderson and four Spanish artistes on a very mysterious release. Over 26 tracks, a strange and disconnected dream-like narrative begins to coalesce. The Spanish performers deliver recits and songs - all in their native tongue (although translations are thoughtfully provided), whose concise lyrics deal with transgressive themes involving the death of God, anti-religious sentiments, nuns, sodomy, and passing references to William Burroughs, Roland Barthes and Aleister Crowley. (Crolwey's ghost has probably informed most of this CD; the title may refer to his *White Stains* book of poems.) Some of these are sung like nursery rhymes; others are chanted in solemn, ceremonial voices. Connecting the recits, we have murky abstract musical sequences of grindy-groans, layers of subdued feedback, rather unpleasant tape-loops and a vague rumbling in the distance. A very sparing use of electronics, and occasional attacks of pounding industrial noise. All of this contributes to the aura of menace throughout the CD. The highlight for this listener is the piano contributions of one Brad Anderson, whose composition 'Thirteen Pieces for Piano, Opus 1' keeps emerging as an 'underlying motif' throughout *Stain*. Anderson pounds and hammers the keys with manic deliberation or performs skittish, crazy tarantella-styled rondellos with a scary passion. If word be true, Anderson is genuinely mentally ill, the inmate of a psychiatric ward. Again, his unhinged work adds greatly to the vaguely ominous feeling of this unsettling and enigmatic work.

Lifestyle is a slightly earlier release which arrives in an all-white slipcase package, stuffed full of artworks by Dan Bantz, depicting the human comedy as a crowd of naked men and women packed together in crowded, semi-erotic vistas. While not an unpleasant listen, *Lifestyle* (featuring the core trio of Ultra) lacks the interesting dimensions afforded by the collaboration above, and comes down to nine tracks of droney and gloomy instrumental music. Although there's no denying the 'atmospheric' strengths, it's all rather sluggish, and vaguely depressing. A slightly ethnic-sounding guitar plucks notes over shimmering washes of soundscapes; a lonely piano echoes down empty halls; a shouting voice is filtered through electronic enhancements. A find blend of the harsh and the mellow results, an intoxicating mix which many listeners will appreciate (and I gather Ultra do have fans who care intensely about their output). Again, track titles indicate Ultra's preoccupations with transgressive sexual and occult materials (although it has to be said, the content here is relatively tame compared with that of the first x-rated LP, *Youthful Pleasures*, roundly condemned as 'a vile LP' by critics). 'Refining The Fetish (for Pierre Molinier)' is a dedication to the infamous photographer-collagist who had a penchant for masks, whips and bizarre costumes. 'Hexing The Neighborhood' may refer to their black magical aspirations, although their attempt to fashion a curse from sound-art somehow lacks the necessary malevolence. 'The Choir in Potter's Field' is more successful, referring to a burial plot for nameless ones which gains some poignancy through its juxtaposition with a found recording of a singing choir. Recorded in America in 2000 and distributed by The Anja Offensive.

ED PINSENT 27/12/2002

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Vagina Dentata Organ

The Perpignan Killings
UNITED KINGDOM
WSNS 002 CD (2002)

We last heard from Jordi Valls (aka Vagina Dentata Organ) with his notorious motorcyle record, *Un Chien Catalan*. The sumptuous sleeve and surrealist track titles for that CD added contextual 'meaning' to the recordings, which were otherwise simply 'straight' documentary recordings of a motorcyle engine. Here, Valls has taken his four vinyl LPs as source material and doctored them extensively - using loops, overdubs, cut-ups, and varispeeding - in four long tracks to produce another artefact of unearthly poetic beauty and a disturbing grim power. In making these cut-ups, he writes that his intention was to produce 'a very INDIGESTIBLE recording...it's against all the PUTREFACTS of POP-MUSIC!'

Well, that's putting it mildly, bub! Look at his sources. His vinyl LPs, neat compressions of extreme and 'transgressive' materials, have acquired a 'legendary' status even to those who never heard them. They were originally issued under the auspices of Genesis P. Orridge, and comprise (1) the growling of a wild attack dog trained to kill; (2) a recording of Jim Jones and the Jonestown massacre; (3) the 2000 pagan drums of Calanda, a small Spanish village; and (4) various couples having sex, perhaps taken from porno movie soundtracks. The titles, sleeve art and pressings of these monsters added further contextual delights - such as the photos of dead Elvis and dead Marilyn on the sex LP, which was called *Cold Meat / Eros & Thanatos (Sex Star I / Sex Star II)*.

All four of those records are combined together in varying dosages on *The Perpignan Killings*, and through this process, a general muddying of sound results - yet extra layers of horrendous interpretation become possible. On 'Time Orders Old Age to Destroy Beauty', the orgasmic cries of the woman being screwed senseless are overdubbed until her breathing becomes an unbearable squall; she's a hydra, a many-headed beast making the beast with two backs. The snarling of the attack dog is added, and becomes the Minotaur in the labyrinth, and the pounding pagan drums urge them on; while the title makes a cruel allusion to human frailness and mortality in the midst of the life-procreating act. The nightmarish Jim Jones record features heavily on 'Delirium Tremens', an alarming enough tape to begin with - but made even worse for being sampled and cut in at the moments when distress is at its highest. Howling crowds, screaming, and the ranting of the insane Revd Jim like a demented shaman. This too is juxtaposed with the pagan drums and the orgasmic moans.

That's horrifying enough, but the third track verges on the unlistenable. The attack dog record is layered into a monstrous montage of continual growling, and collaged with the moaning orgasm-woman once more, and the pagan drums take up the sexual rhythm until the forced connection is inescapable. Sex and death are mixed up in an unholy marriage; the elaborate title 'Mars Makes Love to Venus by the Light of the Stars' reeks of sardonic irony in this context. The final cut 'The Blond Armpit' piles it on just as relentlessly; again, a powerful evocation of the Minotaur myth, and probing the sexual meanings at the core of that myth. Jordi Valls would probably be only to happy to sacrifice virgin girls to the beast in his labyrinth on an annual basis. This is reinforced by the Mark Aleu paintings reproduced within, once of which visualises Lucifer as a large blood-red goat with a flying maiden helplessly drawn towards the vortex of his compelling evil. Aleu's 'Antropomorhic Horse' painting comes close to depicting a strange act of rape; the horse, with female breasts, screams and bares its teeth at the advances of a lover.

Valls speaks of a ruthless deconstruction of his own recordings which he performs with savage glee. But a strange music results from his agenda of auto-violence; his Blood Paintings, details of which are reproduced here with a catalogue of his favourite drinking places around Europe, are further evidence of his shock tactics and auto-violence. Real bloodstains were even included in some pressings of the pagan drummers LP. If his idea of 'blood on the canvas' makes you think of a boxing match, that isn't far from the truth; you'll feel aurally beaten-up after listening to this brutal record. In fact, since this is potentially such a brutalising experience, I wonder why I like it at all, as normally I have no time for the whole 'transgressive' and 'Apocalypse Culture' scene. I suppose what I like is the Surrealism of it, the passionate nature of VDO's full-bodied approach to shock-performance, and the ingenious compression of the sex-and-death imagery which he lays out with such relentless precision. Certainly it probes areas which other records cannot reach; it's up to you if you want to visit them or not!

ED PINSENT 30/12/2002

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Jordi Valls is interviewed this issue.

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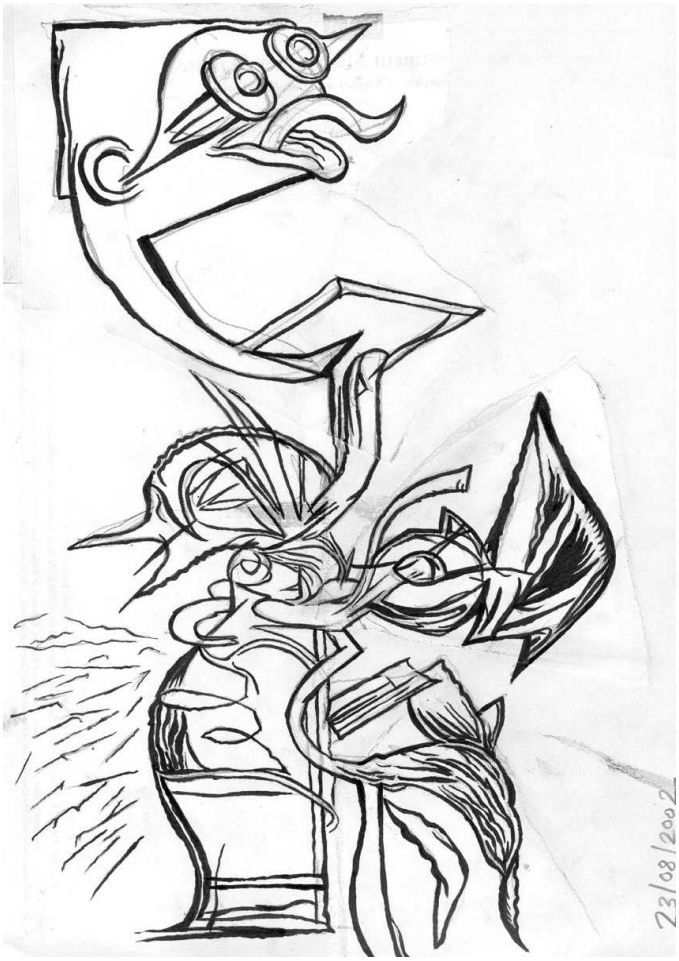

The throaty ROARAGE

SINGERS AND THEIR ISSUE-LED SONGS MY DEFAULT VOICE IS ON

The Angels of Light
How I Loved You
USA YOUNG GOD YG16 CD (2001)

The Angels of Light
We Were Alive!
USA YOUNG GOD NO NUMBER CD (2002)

Michael Gira and Dan Matz
What We Did
USA YOUNG GOD YG17 CD (2001)

When Michael Gira disbanded Swans in 1997, his main reason was that the weight of expectation surrounding the group's name had become a liability. Since 1982, Swans had marshalled the transformative qualities of sound in a way that was, and remains, unparalleled in rock. The lurching Industrial rhythms of their earliest work were gradually sloughed off in favour of visionary, crescendo-laden sunbursts. Their last album, *Soundtracks For The Blind*, mixed intense balladry with spoken word tape loops and Ambient textures to ecstatic effect.

Since then, Gira has further refined his exploration into the redemptive powers of the song with the Angels of Light. (The parallel Body Lovers project, of which the first part of a promised trilogy has so far appeared, continues the journey into the realms of the psycho-Ambient.) *How I Loved You*, the second Angels of Light album, has recently been complemented by the release of a limited (750) edition live CD, *We Were Alive!*, available only through Gira's website.

Gira is nothing if not a soul singer, and the ten songs comprising *How I Loved You* are saturated with pure, heartfelt emotion. The voice is bitter, regretful and yearning, as Gira maps out vast territories of love and loss. While some of Swans' visceral attack may have been purged, there is certainly no let-up in the masterful play of tension and release on which these songs turn. The acoustic guitar is at the forefront, augmented by breathy accordion, wisps of pedal steel and firmly insistent percussion.

'Evangeline' is how Leonard Cohen should sound these days, if his once rich muse hadn't been terminally derailed by clodhopping irony and an inexplicable liking for cheesy synthesised arrangements. Gira assumes the role of romantic troubadour with ease, his closely miked vocals suffused with a graceful eroticism. 'My True Body' is much darker. Gira comes on like an old time preacher, while the song is driven along by thunderous drumming.

The Angels really take flight, however, on the centrepiece 'New City In The Future' and the closing 'Two Women'. Both last over ten minutes, and both are flawless blends of rousing chord progressions and achingly vivid melodic intensity. Multitracked guitars reverberate endlessly around Gira's passionate incantations of desire and possession.

The live album captures the Angels at a 2001 concert in Toronto. The sound quality is not perfect, but the immense power of the ensemble is well in evidence, as are the sublime touches of glockenspiel and accordion that add light and shade everywhere. Five new songs are aired, including the exceptional 'All Souls Rising', and in deference to history the concert ends with emotive readings of two of Swans' finest songs, 'God Damn The Sun' and 'Failure'. The CD is nicely packaged in a clear plastic wallet with a printed envelope and personalised artwork.

What We Did is a more intimate affair, a collaboration between Gira and Dan Matz of Windsor For The Derby (who supported Swans on tour in 1997). These songs edge towards the mythic Americana of the Band and Gram Parsons.

Gira and Matz alternate lead vocals, and the gently played acoustic guitar patterns are strengthened by atmospheric piano and harmonica. The pairing results in an album that quietly seduces the listener with its warmth and understated sensitivity.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.younggodrecords.com

Dara
Dara
USA ECSTATIC PEACE RECORDS AND TAPES E#70D ONE-SIDED VINYL LP (2002)

A solo record from Dara, one-woman performer who used to sing with 4AD stars His Name Is Alive. She turns in a fine set of her own material, degraded electro-pop indie songs which actually deliver on the promise of 100 Rough Trade or SST / Homestead releases of the 1980s. Using old Farfisa and Casio keyboards, drum machines and distortion, this record is the aural equivalent of an arthouse movie filmed using one of those kid's toy camcorders. Sweet melodies fit for a band such as Opal, and sung slightly out of tune. Much as I like the singing, my fave of these 6 cuts is the instrumental 'Quavers', a creaking wheezing drone like dying electronic harmoniums in a Victorian parlour. But the whole LP is just dandy. Fine weirdness from the rugged frontier of artrock.

Dara is a visual artist, filmmaker and performance artist who has worked / lived in urban hell-kitchens Detroit and NYC, Besides having all the hip credentials (Sun Ra through to Harry Partch) in her checklist of influences / tastes, she also worked on a side project Creature 79 with Stooges guitarist Ron Asheton and has worked in Brown Cuts Neighbors, an NYC performance and multi-media combo.

ED PINSENT 23/11/2002

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The Fall

The Fall vs 2003

UNITED KINGDOM ACTION RECORDS TAKE20CD CD SINGLE (2002)

Released to coincide (more or less) with the Queen's Speech, this sees The Fall making their (short) statement of intent for the coming year. And after the semi-successful stripped down garage experiment of 2001's *Are You Are Missing Winner?* LP, it looks like it's back to techno mode for MES, his latest keyboard-playing wifey, and his boy recruits. Not that they've forsaken their instruments of course - there's guitars buried somewhere under the great wodges of pounding electro-bass and Allen Ravenstine-style pancake-frying FX of lead track 'Susan vs Youthclub'. There's also some nice effects on MES's voice as he treats us to the song's hook in falsetto and relates a flight-of-fancy based on one of the weirder plotlines from *Neighbours*. All of which turns one of the skimpier of the band's riffs into yet another full-blooded and catchy Fall single.

Not that anyone'll get to hear it, as the chances of songs like this being played on the airwaves (Peely excepted) are slim. In fact it's more likely to crop up in a telly advert than to appear on London's so-called 'alternative' radio station XFM during the day - in fact you may have heard another Fall non-hit, 'Touch Sensitive', being used to plug the Vauxhall Corso recently. It's a scary state of affairs when advertisers seem to have more imagination and musical awareness than most radio DJs.

As for the rest of this almost-EP, well a Fall single was once as desirable and coherent a musical statement as a Fall LP (think of 'Lie Dream of a Casino Soul / Fantastic Life' or the *Victoria* EP to name but two), but now they tend to be less ambitious, falling into the more traditional strong a-side/weak b-side trap, with the CD versions padded out (as here) by ho-hum dance remixes. So in 'Janet vs Johnny' there's the skeleton of a fine tune, but Smith has his default-voice on and doesn't seem as confident or decisive as usual in fleshing out the track. Not that I'm really complaining - in Fall terms a weak effort is still better than most other buggers will ever manage. Roll on 2003.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

Peter Hammill

Clutch

UNITED KINGDOM FIE 9127 CD (2002)

Peter Hammill continues to hold a unique and ridiculously unheralded place within contemporary music. No-one negotiated the treacherous terrain of progressive rock more adroitly than Hammill did with Van der Graaf Generator, and no-one, with the honourable exception of Robert Fripp, has acquitted himself with more dignity following its inevitable demise. *Clutch* is firm evidence that Hammill's creative fire continues to burn as strongly as ever, 35 years after he began making music.

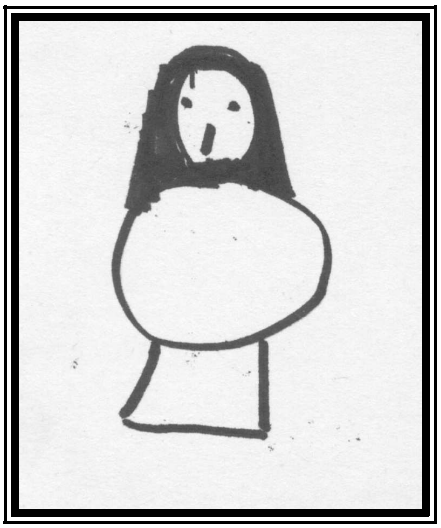
Clutch is as defiant and questing as any of Hammill's forty-odd previous albums. As usual, these spirited qualities are often submerged beneath a surface of reflectiveness and melancholy. But it is never long before they break through, propelled by the ferocious roar of Hammill's voice and the unbridled energy of the instrumentation. The songs are performed exclusively on acoustic guitar, with minimal contributions from Hammill's long-time collaborators David Jackson (saxophone, flute) and Stuart Gordon (violin). This is the first time in his career that the guitar has been so foregrounded, but as Hammill remarks in his sleeve note this 'has not turned out as any kind of folk or roots collection.' Hammill describes his guitar playing as 'functional', but there is far more than mere utility in the spectral half-melodies that haunt the opening 'We Are Written', or the chordal slash and burn of 'Bareknuckle Trade'.

Lyrically Hammill is, as ever, preoccupied with weighty matters. There are courageous, issue-led songs about religious hatred, anorexia and paedophilia; emotional reflections on life as a father and musician; and philosophical broodings on the nature of free will and predestination. Whatever the subject, the sentiments are expressed powerfully and eloquently, and delivered with peerless authority and gravitas.

Hammill doesn't merely sing these songs, he inhabits them with serpentine grace and fervent energy. The densely packed, argumentative lyrics tumble forth and constantly threaten to break the limits of the song. He will alight on a word or phrase and invest it with a charged, visionary significance. The guitar gathers restlessly around the voice, now darting in sparkling trails of note clusters, now exploding in bursts of angry riffing. Even at its most becalmed, this is urgent and passionate music.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.sofasound.com



OrangUtan

OrangUtan

UNITED KINGDOM SOUND CHASER NO NUMBER CD-R (2001)

An EP's worth of music - five rather loud and raucous psychedelic rock songs, performed, written and sung with heavy-handed gusto by Jonathan Hellier in a studio in Newport with the assistance of engineer and programmer Andrew Rock, and a supporting cast of guest drummers, backing singers and sax player. Quite a creditable outing, with occasional good melodies and an appealing sound - built from very heavy guitar chords for the most part, it can get kinda dense and over-layered in places. When the non-stop torrent of florid LSD-inspired lyrics goes into overdrive - eg on 'Crystals Dripping Venom' or 'Van Helsing', the whole experience gets a bit airless. JH plays virtually everything himself and it occurs to me that he's essentially a good rhythm guitarist - a really good psyched-out lead guitar would make this record much better and tip it over the edge into the total freak-out he's aiming for. Features a pretty girl dressed as a magic star-child on the cover.

ED PINSENT 23/12/2002

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Sonic Youth

Murray Street

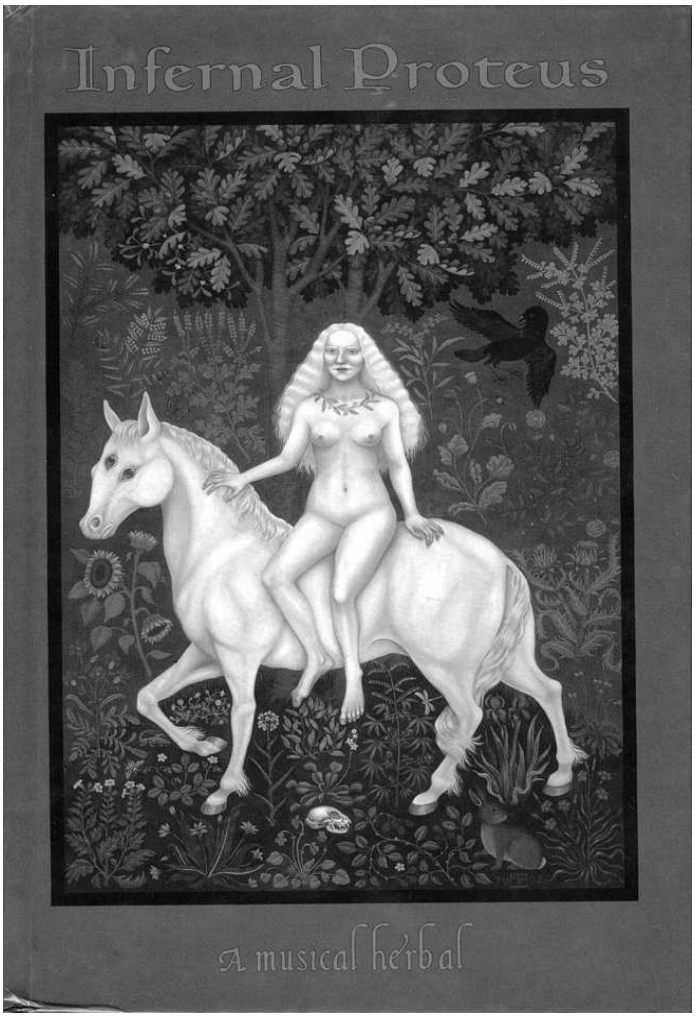
USA GEFFEN 493 319-2 CD (2002)

aka Sonic Youth discover The Isley Brothers. I'm not being facetious - their latest masterpiece is shot through with much the same laconic and expansive sunny afternoon feeling found in songs like 'That Lady' and 'Summer Breeze'. But whilst some have touted this as Sonic Youth's 'classic rock record', that's true only in as much as *Goo* was their Monkees LP (as they tried to claim at the time) - ie spot on if you're listening in from a parallel universe. Maybe it's just in recognition that *Murray Street* is more accessible than most of their records, with songs less angular and aggressive than usual, and the band holding off for a whole three tracks before going for one of their trademark abstract noise breakdowns. Even the guest appearance of Borbetomagus noise makers Jim Sauter and Don Dietrich is kept relatively low and unthreatening in the mix.

The songs here are more loosely defined than normal and while it's hard to point to any guitar line and say 'that's a great riff', that seems to be becoming less and less important to the success of their music. Anyway, the structure of a typical Sonic Youth song is somewhat arbitrary, episodic, and divorced from the content - you could probably cut up the various tracks where one section ends and another begins, and switch them from one song to another without anyone noticing. So what starts off as one type of tune could end up just about anywhere - the fairly straightforward no-wave tune that begins 'Rain on Tin' develops into a joyous sunrise-marking organic guitar progression as beautiful as any Popol Vuh track, builds to a crescendo, then falls away only to return for a second round before suddenly ending in an ensemble scale-jumping pulse fest.

The best track is saved for last - 'Sympathy for the Strawberry'. Here the music is most resolutely abstract and detached from obvious precedents and I'm guessing that's because it was put together during group jamming, rather than built upon one of Thurston's acoustic sketches. Also, the singing here comes in the middle - (for some reason that's a good sign in a Sonic Youth track) - Kim Gordon hams it up beautifully and

"The World of Flora Encompasses Our Lives..."
RICHARD REES JONES finds out why with an amazing new 4-CD set from ANJA



even goes so far as to lilt (no shit, Gordon doubters).

This is the first Sonic Youth LP proper to include newcomer Jim O'Rourke as an official member of the band, but my ears aren't sensitive enough to detect what he contributes - I suppose that could mean he's doing something right. Otherwise, band duties are split along traditional Sonic Youth lines. Thurston Moore takes the main share of the vocal duties. Lee Ranaldo only gets time to sing on one track (well, he does have all those books to read) but naturally it turns out to contain the most ambitious and sophisticated melody on the LP. Kim Gordon provides the edgy, snotty and borderline-annoying numbers. And as ever the band's secret weapon is drummer Steve Shelley, giving shape and order to all the looseness and abstraction with the snap of his kick drum.

There's no revelations or new directions here, but don't let that disappoint you. As an unit, Sonic Youth's musical bag of tricks was set in stone about the time of *Daydream Nation* and for a while it looked like they might have played themselves into a dead end. But since their *Washing Machine*-era resurgence, their extra-curricular dalliances with the avant-garde seem to be doing them the world of good, and they appear to have no trouble renewing themselves and finding new areas to explore within the boundaries of their sound. Long may they continue.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

Various Artists

Infernal Proteus: A Musical Herbal

USA :AJNA: ISBN 0-9721820-0-4
BOOK AND 4 X CDS (2002)

How often do you think about plants? However important they are to you, it's probably not as important as they are to the creators of *Infernal Proteus*. This is a 96-page hardback book, containing 40 colour illustrations of plants. Each illustration is complemented by a piece of music on one of the four CDs included. Each piece of music is supposed to illustrate the plant in question, although this is not always obvious when listening to them.

I recently spent a day walking around the Eden Project, the former quarry in Cornwall that has been given over to exploring and strengthening mankind's relationship with the world of plants. The Eden site contains two vast glass domes that meticulously recreate the climatic conditions existing in various parts of the world – the tropical rainforest, the Mediterranean and rural Australia, for example. Plants normally found only in those areas survive and flourish in the domes. It's a fascinating place, allowing the visitor to experience the beauty and resourcefulness of plants in ways that would otherwise be closed off to most.

In literature, Wordsworth exemplified the Romantic fascination with nature, viewing animals, plants and the landscape as essentially reflective of human experience. At the same time, however, the poet John Clare – a Cambridgeshire labourer who, when not being held in asylums, spent the whole of his life working on the land – wrote about nature in a far more direct, unmediated way. For Clare, the existence of animals and plants was so vivid, so powerful, that to write about them in relation to his own life would have been an unthinkable violation. Bolstered by pressing ecological concerns, the Eden Project proposes a similar view of plants as deserving of attention and respect in their own right.

A different approach to the natural world informs *Infernal Proteus*. The collection is subtitled 'A Musical Herbal'; traditionally, a herbal is a book containing descriptions of plants with medicinal properties. Although some of the plants here, such as yohimbe, ginkgo and marijuana, do have such properties, most do not, and one or two, such as poison ivy, are positively harmful. Compiler Tyler Davis confirms in his introduction that the book is not intended as a herbal in the traditional sense. Instead, it takes its lead from the Romantic impulse to view plants through a prism of human concerns and desires. Davis writes:

'The world of flora encompasses our lives, and can provide physical and/or spiritual renewal. Each person must have an affinity with at least one plant, yet he or she may not know it.'

This belief is shared by many of the contributors to the compilation, at least those who have included explanatory texts with their images and music. The notes to In Gowan Ring's homage to the dandelion, and the song itself, anticipate the consumption of wine made from the flower. Makoto Kawabata of Acid Mothers Temple, one of the best known of the artists here, poignantly recollects his childhood fascination with the poisonous equinox flower. Baradelan sees the miniature bonsai tree both as an aid to meditation and as a symbol of mental and physical imprisonment.

The music itself is largely abstract ambient soundscaping, with occasional detours into sinister folk dirges and the occasional rollicking show-stopper. What follows is a selective rundown of some of the highlights.

Disc one concentrates more on gothic/Romantic songform than the later discs. Of these, the previously mentioned In Gowan Ring contribute a plaintive, beautifully wistful paean to the dandelion, its lilting vocals and restrained instrumentation steeped in regret and longing. Venereum Arvum lend an eerie, *Wicker Man*-inflected atmosphere to 'Hawthorn', the words of a traditional English song telling of death and renewal. On 'Kelp', Amber Asylum offer an exquisitely sad nocturne for violin, cello and voice. Of the instrumentals, Endura's 'Hops' is a delightful, suitably merry piccolo exercise in praise of the plant judiciously described as "the medicine of the poor".

Disc two begins the trend towards the ambient that is maintained for the rest of the collection. The pick of these is 'Beech' by Jonathan Coleclough (who has collaborated with Nurse With Wound's Colin Potter) and Tim Hill, a striking and disorientating dronescape. Elsewhere, Kern & Van Pelt's 'Pomegranate' is a vivid evocation of lost love, the crackle of an old record lending the piece a distant, enchanted aura. Steve Roden's 'Pine' is also of interest, being one of the few pieces in the collection where, we are told, the plant itself is used as a sound source. The introduction informs us that the piece was made by rubbing two pine cones together and electronically manipulating the results in the studio. The result is a barrage of uunerving knocking sounds, underpinned by a dark rhythmic pulse. HU's 'Tea' (on disc four) was produced in a similarly organic fashion, by running a violin bow across tea leaves; but the latter piece is far less notable, and the accompanying note on 'cryptoacoustics' (a bogus theory that sound can carry 'spiritual energy') is risible.

Disc three begins disastrously with The Red King's 'Opium Poppy', a dismal farrago of gothic pomposity, blaring synthesisers and cod-operatic vocals. Quality takes a further nosedive with the dreary sub-Current 93 folk of Numinosum, but picks up again with a trio of looming soundscapes by Wolfskin, Nerthiagh and Mnortham. The closing piece, Baradelan's 'Bonsai', modulates from soothing major chords and an affecting female voice to a spooky netherworld of rumbles and drones.

Disc four lurches unexpectedly into Industrial territory, with Mania and Igor 18 both coming up with intelligent, well crafted blasts of noise. The Lotus Eaters (not, one imagines, the 80s popsters who had a hit with 'The First Picture of You') have the pleasure of writing about marijuana. Their contribution is less woozy than you might expect, blending harsh extremes of feedback with languorous, seductive guitar lines. Makoto Kawabata bows his guitar for an extended drone-athon à la Cale and Conrad, while the aptly named Dave Knott depicts the giant sequoia redwood tree with a flickering, Fahey-esque backwoods ambience.

The book is beautifully produced, my only quibble being the tatty plastic pockets inside the front and back covers that house the CDs. The illustrations are uniformly excellent, ranging in medium from photography to pen and ink, oils and computer-treated images. This is a handsome release and a true labour of love. One may take issue with the metaphysical nature of some of the contributors' speculations, but there is no doubting the seriousness of their engagement with the project, or the success with which they direct our attention towards the often overlooked world of plants, herbs and trees.

RICHARD REES JONES

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Richard Youngs

May

UNITED KINGDOM JAGJAGUWAR
JAG43 CD (2002)

Richard Youngs follows up *Sapphie* and *Making Paper* (both reviewed in SP10) with a third collection of unearthly minimalist folk songs. This time the album is shorter (a perfectly formed 36 minutes) and the songs less meandering than before, but there is no change in Youngs' ability to hold the listener in rapt contemplation. There are six songs, starkly arranged for acoustic guitar and voice. Youngs' strong, confident playing communicates a sense of pastoral longing and quietude, as in the slipping refrain of 'Trees That Fall' and the hypnotic, slowly turning phrase of 'Wynding Hills of Maine'.

The lyrics are allusive, intensely solipsistic texts in which certain key terms – all/call/fall, bloom/dream/wynd – are combined and recombined in various permutations. This is far from being the sterile exercise it may sound. As with the novels and plays of Samuel Beckett, there is a distinctly formal rigour to the layout of the texts, and from that formalism comes a sense of mutability and return to the source. Cyclicality, and in particular seasonal change, are evoked in Youngs' wistful imagery of blooming, fall and winter.

Youngs' voice has a strained, yearning quality that permeates the songs and transforms them into bleak transmissions from a hermetic environment. It is this sense of a mind struggling to impose a structure on a world slipping out of control that enables Youngs to sidestep the obvious Nick Drake and Bert Jansch influences and turns *May* into a work of rare beauty and passion.

RICHARD REES JONES

www.jagjaguwar.com

The Sound-Composter

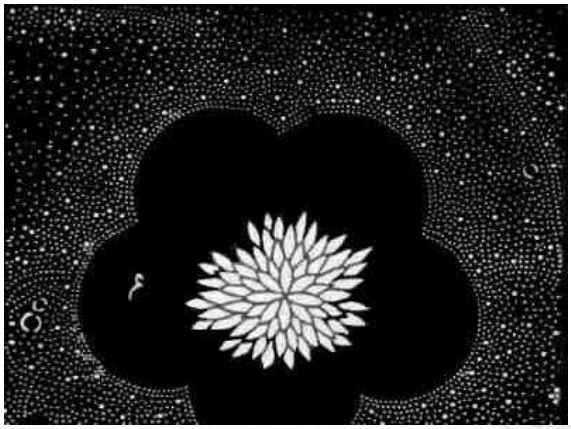
Mnortham interview

Mnortham is Michael Northam, an American sound artist who makes compelling sounds and extremely abstract, non-specific noiseworks out of highly unlikely sources and methods. His work derives from strange mixtures of field recordings, performance art, non-musical objects being pressed into service as musical instruments, and oblique methods of composing. Although partially intuitive in his approach (sometimes using impenetrable hieroglyphics to prepare a composition), Mnortham eschews jazz-based or free-form improvisation in favour of his own concentrated, focussed methods. His work first reached this magazine in the shape of a twelve-inch record *Many Rivers Move Along The Surface of the Magnet*, recorded in Seattle. Mnortham is currently based in London and has made his home in many inhospitable parts of Europe, where has met and worked with like-minded individuals. Unusual recorded artefacts have resulted from these encounters.

Date: 30 October 2002
Location: The Eastern Eye restaurant, Brick Lane, London
EP = Ed Pinsent
MN = Mnortham

EP How long have you been making music?

MN I first did actual sound recordings in a video art class, in 1989. I had a good teacher that, before we did any video, had us simple consider sound and make a video without visuals, composing it on a cassette four-track. She thought that if you're going to make video art, sound is quite often overlooked and therefore she wanted to start with it. That was the first time I ever did anything, and everything else, technically speaking, developed from that. Soon after I moved to Austin, Texas where I met the people behind N D magazine and was introduced to many new things and began to help them with organising performances of groups such as: zoviet:france, Zbigniew Karkowski, Phauss, The Hafler Trio as well the performance artist Andre Stitt. So while meeting these artists, who previously I had never heard of, and meeting with them and watching them perform I received a bit of an insight into sound as an art form. I felt somehow naturally drawn to such work and it seemed to further ideas and experiences I had been having already with photography, action painting and performance work. I felt sound was a logical progression from these other forms, therefore I began to explore it further. This officially began with my first solo performance in 1991 in Austin. But reflecting on how long it has been I must say

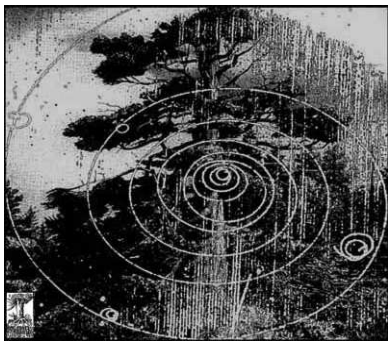


that I feel like sound is just something that has always fascinated me, and seeing these performances made me realize that there were possibilities that I had not yet considered to explore more intimately these previously vague fascinations.

EP You seem to be a musician who has a strong connection with the environment.

MN Yes, the possibilities of sense of space or environment has always fascinated me. As a child I remember specifically asking adults what makes an environment? It was something I couldn't get my head around. That this experience of any particular environment, the light of the day, the smells, the temperature, what your personal state is, whether you're hungry or satisfied, whether you're anxious or happy, all these things, both interior and exterior, create these atmospheres, these environments. And I've always been fascinated by what creates a particular environment, because certainly we've all experienced particular environments that we remember throughout our lifetimes. Something you'll always try to find again, very subtle, very precious. I've worked through different artistic mediums, and sound for me is somehow the most effective method of creating and exploring the sense of 'environment'. Also it's a type of environmental mirror, in a way. When people compose, whatever they end up doing is a reflection of their personal experience - of how they experience. Equally, when people listen to things, what they find in a recording is a reflection of their experience as well. With sound as a medium, from both directions - the form

of creation, and the form of perception - you can really learn a lot about yourself, and others, and humans in general. Learn a lot about the condition of existence by observing how sound affects a person, yourself or another.



EP So I guess you never answered those questions you had as a child - you're still searching?

MN Oh, you don't answer them - there is no answer.

EP It seems to me a lot of people in the modern world have really lost touch with this. Some people can't even perceive their environment at all. People are quite insensitive to even the simplest things, like the weather.

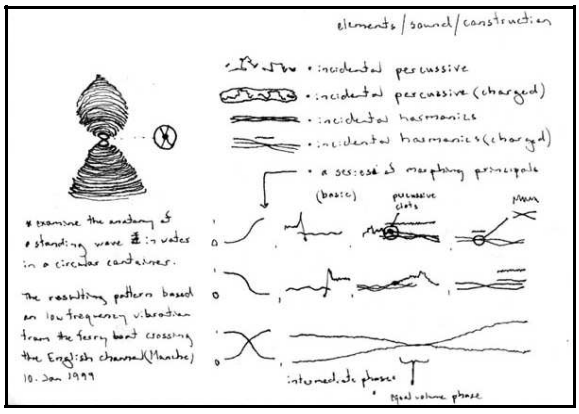
MN Yes, they sort of skim across the surface. The fact that an average person is not totally amazed by looking at the sky, for example...the weather is perhaps the most tumultuous entity on the planet! This subject is almost a political aspect of my music, to bring this to people's attention. That's why I've dealt with long time-frames, because people are so speedy. I had a friend in Rome for example who told me that I could only make music like I make in Oregon, that people in Rome just couldn't make music like that - just because life is too fast. The funny thing is that people in Oregon don't necessarily make music like that, either. Heh-heh-heh! But I do think urban environments sometimes tend to give people an inclination towards rhythms. Rhythmic music, techno music and stuff like that, seems very popular in urban environments, just because there's a kind of pace that resonates with the condition of the environment - for example the daily experience of public transport. And further I think that I am curious about exploring 'environments' that are liminal, subtle, passing in unclear moments and so I tend to avoid latching on to obvious things that are literally shoved into our ears in our current age - seeking more what has tended to be overlooked and ignored by what is popularly deemed of value.

EP The other side to it is that people aren't really paying attention, and they can't really understand things because we haven't got a long enough attention span.

MN It's funny, because sometimes people even consider my music as tension-causing, because I attempt to hold the attention for a long time. Without really giving a climax or release, or more typical musical structures, and people find that long held attention without release disturbs them. I always play with the words - INTENTION / IN-TENSION. Having intention and having music that's in-tension is a type of way of causing ATTENTION in the listener! And it causes attention, and sometimes people just get frustrated with this, almost...I wouldn't say my music forces people to have attention, but it causes a person to have a sustained feeling of attention. That's something that I have work towards, and I could say that with newer projects I've been more playful, and am not as bent on that all the time. But it has been a interesting way of working.

EP But it's not as though you're setting out to play havoc with Western codes of composition; you've just got your own agenda, which happens to get across what is accepted as music. Traditional composition is, to me, very narrative - it has starts and stops, and a payoff at the end...

MN And I've been trying to play with that. For example, this 'Memoirs for Four Discarded Objects', is perhaps the most potentially 'narrative' simply because I suggest that the works are somehow stories told by these objects, although of course that is very abstract! And if one interprets a narrative it surely must be very bizarre! As well I begin to notice the effect of breath, or pacing, because that becomes an aspect of the process of composition. Because sometimes I'll be composing, I'll be listening, and I'll notice that I've forgotten to breathe. And my music sometimes feels like that, it's not breathing and I find that an interesting aspect. I think that's a valid and interesting area of consideration : the affect of physical and psychological experience of the creator during the process of sound creation. Perhaps that is an aspect of psycho-acoustics, but the other way around. I think you could even move into the area of this idea of attention or non-attention. Attention-causing or neurological stochastic systems. Music that gives you the experience of non-linearity, in the sense of a stochastic unfolding process. Or stuff that is very linear. I think there's a strange territory of how these things cause or effect a certain particular experience in the listener.



EP What is The Stomach of the Sky? *That's the name a CD you put out on Staalplaat.*

MN That was something that was from Aboriginal mythology, that at the time I was becoming interested in, in the sense of - because I had created a cassette before that called *Many Rivers Move Across The Surface Of The Magnet*, and I learned that they had some mythology that was related to the earth as a magnetic entity, and that the stomach of the sky basically is the earth. In the sense that the sky is - the atmosphere, the magnetosphere, it goes through and gets digested by the earth, which is what happens in the magnetosphere. Because the centre of the earth is a magnetic core. I just sort of jump off - I like to mix things around, so I just happened to read about that and they had one phrase - 'the stomach of the sky' - and I just liked that. It just happens to give me this feeling over a sustained time frame. For this work I was inspired by Andrei Tarkovski, specifically the film *Solaris*. Because, if you remember Solaris, at the very end the ship was orbiting around this planet that was itself consciousness. And so this idea of humanising inanimate objects. Understanding that the universe itself is an organism. We're just a layer of that organism, like the skin. Humans move around and they think that they're conscious, but we're just the skin of another organism, which is the earth.

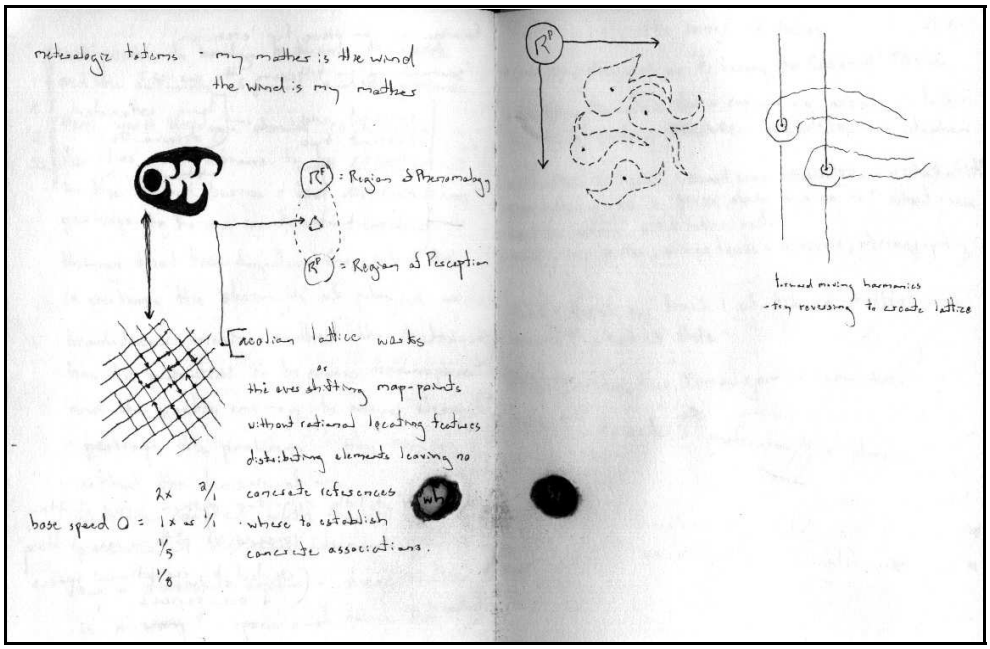
EP But is there any intent in the music to express the meaning of that mythology?

MN In my music I don't think I'm attempting to express anything specific! I try to avoid that. My idea of music - I've been calling it 'Compost', sound-compost, I like to take sound and work it in such a way that is similar to what organic material does when it composts. Take out the fundamental elements, layer it together hundreds of times and see what comes from the degrading, heavily-layered structures. And from that, seduce out some finer details. I don't intend meaning so much as just to let this compost happen. I have a goal of creating something that I myself can't memorise. I don't like compositions or structures that I've thought so much about that I know in advance exactly what happens. Finished work ideally should be mysterious to me. When I can come in on a part and I don't really remember everything I did - that is an ideal outcome.

The naming process for me, usually I have some symbolic name that I put on tapes, that's simple and it's a project that I'm heading for. Names are important for me, they're like beacons. I have this idea about what I want to [achieve] and I work on it. If what I'm doing goes in a different direction, because I try to follow whatever I'm doing, instead of trying to keep it [on course] or mould it into something. I just let the sounds turn into something, like a garden - that's, again, my compost idea. Instead of a composer, I'm a composter!

EP The process is more important to you than the output, from what you're saying?

MN No, no. The process is just a way to get to an output, and the output for me is - the quality of the final sound work. There are some composers that like to work with this particular set of rules or intention, for example 'no processing'. And only pure field recordings [are allowed]. But as for me, I don't really care. I will do anything! I could use a cassette tape that's completely degraded



and run it through an old guitar pedal. For example I just was in conversation with a friend, a composer from Montreal. I was suggesting why not take a microphone and drag it through a park? And use that as a basis [for a piece] and then go through it and cut out the bits that you don't like, and keep the bits that you do like. And then keep the silences, so just silence the parts that you don't like. So there is a pace remaining from the bits that you do like. And then have that be the skeleton [of the work] and then put meat on it with other material. There's many ways. You just pull an absurd action and make that the basis. For example, *From Within The Solar Cave* the last CD I released from Athens, Greece. This piece was based on a very noisy improvisation that I did with this guy in Berlin, CO Caspar and John Grzinich. A very intense initial raw sound. I wanted to turn it into a more minimal composition, that was my general goal. So I took all the bits that I liked and I made little drawings that describe each of the bits that I liked. I took all those drawings and then made a flowchart, a very absurd flowchart of these little tiny icons, like a cartoon almost. String 'em together in a very bizarre way. Then I took those little bits of the improvisation and layered them in a particular way, based on that drawing. Then that created a new structure, then I began what I call the molecular processing - similar to this composting - where I take all those elements in the flowchart and layer each of those in lots of little sub-mixes that are sometimes 20 to 80 layers of similar material. Which then creates this current, which is like a drone, but - especially on that album, if you turn it up [loud] - you'll hear that there's a lot more complexity. It's not simply a drone, because it's made from stochastic material that is layered.

EP I'm interested in that private method of communication you have...your flowcharts with their hieroglyphs. Is it a language that only you can understand?

MN Sometimes yes. Sometimes it's very logical, but sometimes it is similar to trying to remember your half-asleep visions, being as articulate as possible about them, and if you try to be honest about that articulation you find that you must begin to use a language that only you understand. Later maybe you can translate it into more of a general language, but each of us, when we're half asleep in the morning, we are operating inside of our own consciousness with a sort of language that we only understand (perhaps simply a direct non-lingual experience), it's a very internal and intimate thing. I feel that it's right to begin working with music with that same type of extreme personal or intimate logic.

EP A deliberate strategy, to try and keep it slightly imprecise?

MN Exactly.

EP So, you're out there performing some kind of action, whether it's dragging a microphone or playing an improvisation. That would be a starting point, then you start to evolve this quite - erm - personal method of composing...

MN Yes, although often it's like going into a dark room and looking for a gem. It often takes a long time at the beginning. A lot of frustration, I don't know where I'm going. I [sometimes] have a metaphorical thing. For example *:coyot:* which is an album I did with windharps and wind-related sounds. I wanted to do something with the windharps. And I wanted to deal with the metaphor of wind, and molecules of air in the wind. But to work this way it requires a bit of perseverance.

EP So, as well as the field recordings and the documents of your actions, you improvise on home-made instruments as well?

MN Yeah, the instruments are really just anything I find. This last Winter in France brought that back home to me, since I was living for some months without any of my normal equipment. I was forced to return to simply using contact microphones, and dealing with things that I could find [around me]. I was living in a squat and I just dealt with things I could find along the street. I didn't have much money. So I ended up doing situations with wooden boxes as resonators, and softening the sound of contact microphones by putting different types of materials on them, and began to improvise, going back to what I used to do many years ago, when I used to just use contact microphones. Returning to this rather basic form, I began to rethink gestural intention and I utilised that more specifically. The project 'Memoirs of Four Discarded Objects' which I mentioned earlier was born from this situation. I used four objects that I found when I was living in France: a bundle of metal strappings that I found in a fireplace in the mountains, a metal spring from a clock or a scale, a chimney cleaner with hundreds of radiating wires that played like an African thumb-piano, and finally a door carillon that had a beautiful tone from many bronze rods. For each one of those I created work using only the object as source material. I've created also contact microphones that were like tongs, so that you have a left and right channel and you can put stuff like steel wool or SOS pads in between, and they give stereo static. Last year I also worked with Yannick Dauby, where we created an ensemble called 'Entrelacs' based only on gestural improvisation with found materials and live mixing with field recordings and layered gestures. With Yannick's influence we focussed on evoking a sort of imaginary journey to a series of locations with an emphasis on natural found objects like stones, obsidian, grass, snail shells and the like.

EP Is it important for you to try and build up some kind of rapport with these objects? Would any old thing do for your purposes, or are you attracted to a particular object?

MN For a long time, I was attracted to particular objects from particular locations, from places where I had done field recordings. But I don't feel that it's necessary. For a while in Portland, I organized little workshops with friends, where we would sit together and everyone would bring their favourite sounding objects, we would put on blindfolds, and with someone acting as a sort of conductor begin to explore purely the sound of the objects, finding out what could come from them without visual reference. Sitting near to each other we could work with only the mass of sound we were creating and our individual reactions to what we were hearing from what we were doing. A great and natural feedback began, just listening to what the object could produce. It was a great experience and one that I highly recommend trying with friends. In the past I've had more fetishistic and perhaps esoteric ideas about using objects, but lately this becomes less important - and simply I follow my ear - it doesn't have to be a very specific thing, it's more important the sound it makes and if I can find a variety of ways to seduce sound from it.

EP Are you interested in other forms of improvisation? Are you aware of other improvising musicians?

MN I've never been too into jazz, and a lot of people think that's to my detriment. But I have never really developed the receptors for more deeply exploring jazz. I've had a number of critiques because of this 'lack' in my sound 'education'.

EP Why would it be to your detriment? Do they say you're not a real musician if you don't like jazz?

MN Well, some people have said that. Also they think that there needs to be more of a musical approach. I do this because - first I did painting, and then I did video art, and then I went into performance such as long duration body action art. And the perceptions that I received by doing these long duration absurd actions is one thing that seeded my first inspirations to do music, to do my sound work. It was these long perceptions...such as one time when I was wrapped in a roll of thin aluminum siding. Completely wrapped in this material, laying on my side, for an hour maybe. I slowly moved the whole time - and the sound of this thing, rubbing on itself, wrapped around my head and the rest of my body. This sound had the most beautiful delicate layers to it. And that was something that started me getting interested in recording, and sharing that absurd experience of delicate beauty with someone else. Therefore, the particular free improvisers I've never really quite got along with, because I'm not really interested in freely doing whatever comes to you. Now - there are many things I am learning about the improv and jazz worlds that are in fact very close to what I wish to work towards, such as an interest in the effect on the listener, and that feedback with the act of creation. Or creating a work that exists FOR people to listen to, not just a platform for a freak-out. I begin now to realize the potential of mindful improv, especially thanks to the work with 'entrelacs' I find that there is a powerful potential of working with sound as a medium, and articulate the medium, and composing with this in mind in the moment. And so I discover that there is much to be learned about sound working in the moment - even with my eccentric ear - and you do certainly learn a lot about composing by sensitive improvisation. But I get a bit exhausted by this so-called 'free expression' in the hard core improvisational circles. I think I prefer finding such self-expression in different ways then sound. Although, in general I'm not against it, I just don't want to hear it. I can understand what makes people want to 'freak out' and that is fine - just personally I don't get anything from this method. When I improvise with people, I prefer to have skeleton structures that we work on, based on some basic observation of what we are working with as sound materials - as opposed to just going completely from scratch. I think as well it takes a lot of time to develop a proper understanding of improvisation - and with groups it is a further challenge to listen and tap into what the sonic communication is really orbiting around.

EP What interests me there about what you've just said, is that you're some kind of transmitter - you yourself, or the music, is simply a transmitter.

MN Mm. I just did a seven-inch recently called *Conduit*. And it was a recording using metal straps that I did inside of a nuclear reactor core. It never was used, it was in East Germany. And the construction was stopped when the wall came down. And we had some friends that took us out there and we recorded in the central core. So there was a bit of water on the ground and I used six metal straps that are about a metre and a half long, and just whipping them around in the darkness with the water on the floor. And this created the most *electronic* sounding acoustic recording. Very swssh swsshh. And I called this piece Conduit, because humans are sometimes like a conduit in one way or another. You can't deny it because we're held together by electricity. People think that's New-Agey or esoteric, but it's not. I think that's bullshit, because scientific observation [proves it's true]. Music is ultimately [a conduit], whether it's jazz or whether it's an African drummer or an Indian raga-singer or a guy doing electronic music, they are all different types of conduits, in essence.

EP It sounds like you're interested in building a direct rapport with the audience. You say you're not interested as a traditional improviser, you actually feel you've got something you want to communicate. It may be ambiguous what it is, but you know there's something...

MN The type of performance I enjoy the most is to sit rather close to people, or right in the middle of the audience, and have the speakers around everyone. Because when it works, I have a really intimate feeling with everybody. But when it doesn't work, when it's too removed, I sometimes lose my focus, and then in cases where people are talking and it's like a rock club, I can get really irritated and discover I tend to begin sounding very loud and aggressive. If there's no connection, I lose my ambition to perform. I find that I am sensitive in that way. I do think that if I don't have the opportunity to have an audience...I mean, an audience can be anybody. An audience can be one or two people in the room when I'm playing. Even that really helps. If I don't have that, if I'm completely isolated for a long time I begin to become very lost in sounds, I feel that I need that outside observation to crystallise the work.

EP Is that more important to you than making lots of records?

MN No, not necessarily - because I do like the idea of publishing stuff, in the sense that people can take that into their own space. I often think of CDs as portable installations. So people can use it in whatever way that they want. Therefore I like to present works in recorded form.

EP I'm always amazed by these things, because it's the value of art to me...but it revolves around things which ordinary life does not take into account at all. To me, the kind of stuff you're talking about is what life ought to revolve around, but it doesn't. Instead it revolves around very boring things! Necessary things, how to survive, how to live, how to make money.

MN Is it necessary? Somebody is telling us that those things are necessary, but isn't it just the way that things have been organised.

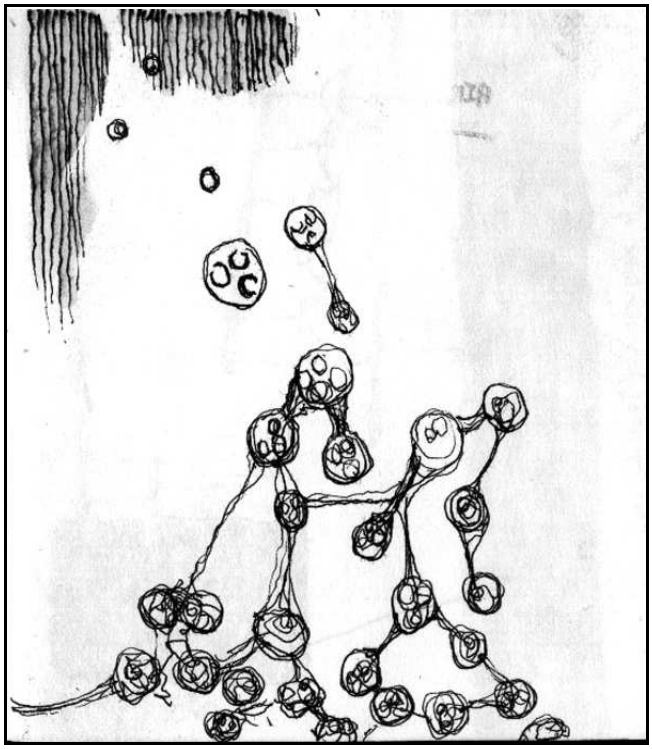
EP That's why I think that art is important, to put us back in touch with the things that really do matter. But what the effect of it all is, I really don't know! Maybe there's a plan behind it all, that will help us evolve into better people. This isn't a question, by the way...

MN I don't really dwell on the idea of being an artist that much...to me, it's more just following intuitive paths. You just go...and you see where going leads you. We're here to go!

For a full discography, biography and list of soundworks by Mnortham, visit

http://preg.org/~mnortham/

Most of the images were taken from this site.



FOUR BLACK VINYL SINGLES

Oren Ambarchi
Der Kleine Konig
GERMANY TONSCHACHT 011 7" SINGLE (2002)

Rosy Parlane
The Peetoom Files
GERMANY TONSCHACHT 009 7" SINGLE (2001)

Vibracathedral Orchestra
The one you call the ghost train
GERMANY TONSCHACHT 010 7" SINGLE (2001)

Keith Fullerton Whitman
Live (at the Tremont Theater)
GERMANY TONSCHACHT 012 7" SINGLE (2002)

One day you will wish that you had purchased every release in this series of seven-inch singles. It's a reliable format - each artist allowed two sides to do whatever they want, some opting for two unrelated pieces, or a long piece in two parts. They're all pressed on thick black vinyl and have generic black sleeve designs with exactly the same typography for every release. Sure to be as collectible as the Table of the Elements guitar series from the 1990s.

Oren Ambarchi is the Australian guitarist currently setting the world ablaze with his heavy-metal styled Bon Jovi antics. 'Der Kleine Konig' is a brilliant distorted mess of coloured electric syrup, through which a poignant melody struggles to appear, only to be caught in a maze of wonky false notes. 'Links' proposes a nicely shimmering tone to buzzsaw your skull. Over 4:14, it accrues feedback and gravitational density in equal amounts. Heavy stuff. One of Oren's better slices of guitar (?) Frippertronics for the modern age.

Keith Fullerton Whitman is a man of whom I know little except he used to be called DJ Hrvatski. Here he wields a quietish guitar with audible amplifier hum, while he picks and chimes on the strings through the course of a long and lonely night. This live performance is, I think, interrupted by edits, clicks and little slips in the continuity; it's gorgeous playing, inconsequential and non-linear in the best way. A moment of peace for the weary worker as he falls asleep on the train. Side two continues the adventure, and it grows yet more mysterious. A light shower of electric rain falls, punctuated with sad and aimless strums. Over time it gathers intensity into a scrapy mass. An intimate dreamy episode of wispiness.

Rosy Parlane recently jammed with Fennesz during the Antipodean Mego tour, and the experience seems to rubbed off on him badly. The very title of this single indicates he's become fixated on his computer soundfiles. 'Kees 1' is rather annoying - disjoined edits of electronic doodles, pasting together little fragments of beeps alongside a parody of a Trip-hop rhythm loop. It seems to be stuck in neutral and stumbles along for several minutes with really saying very much. 'Kees 2' is

slightly more comprehendible - it depicts Edgar Froese in the early days of Tangerine Dream on the day he first bought a mellotron, and kept on trying out a single note. Meanwhile the ghosts of Ohr Records and Virgin buzz around his head. A rather minor work from this New Zealander, disappointing after the grandeur of 2001's *Getxo*.

Vibracathedral Orchestra's offering is another slice of group-think droning in the inimitable unchanging VCO style - the only noticeable progress in the Orch's career is in the number of releases that emerge on a variety of different underground labels. The title tracks is one of their 'ethnic forgeries', an Arab flute dancing with some amazing fills against the usual bowing violin and lively percussion. Pleasant in extremis. 'Oblong Two' is much more intense and semi-chaotic. An extract from a much longer piece we presume. Everyone in this UK combo are squealing and blurting for all they're worth - while the drummer whips them into a frenzy if sustained droning and free-form freakery. At 5:08, nowhere near long enough. But the strong musical contrast between the two sides make this perhaps the essential purchase of the batch here.

ED PINSENT 16/11/2002

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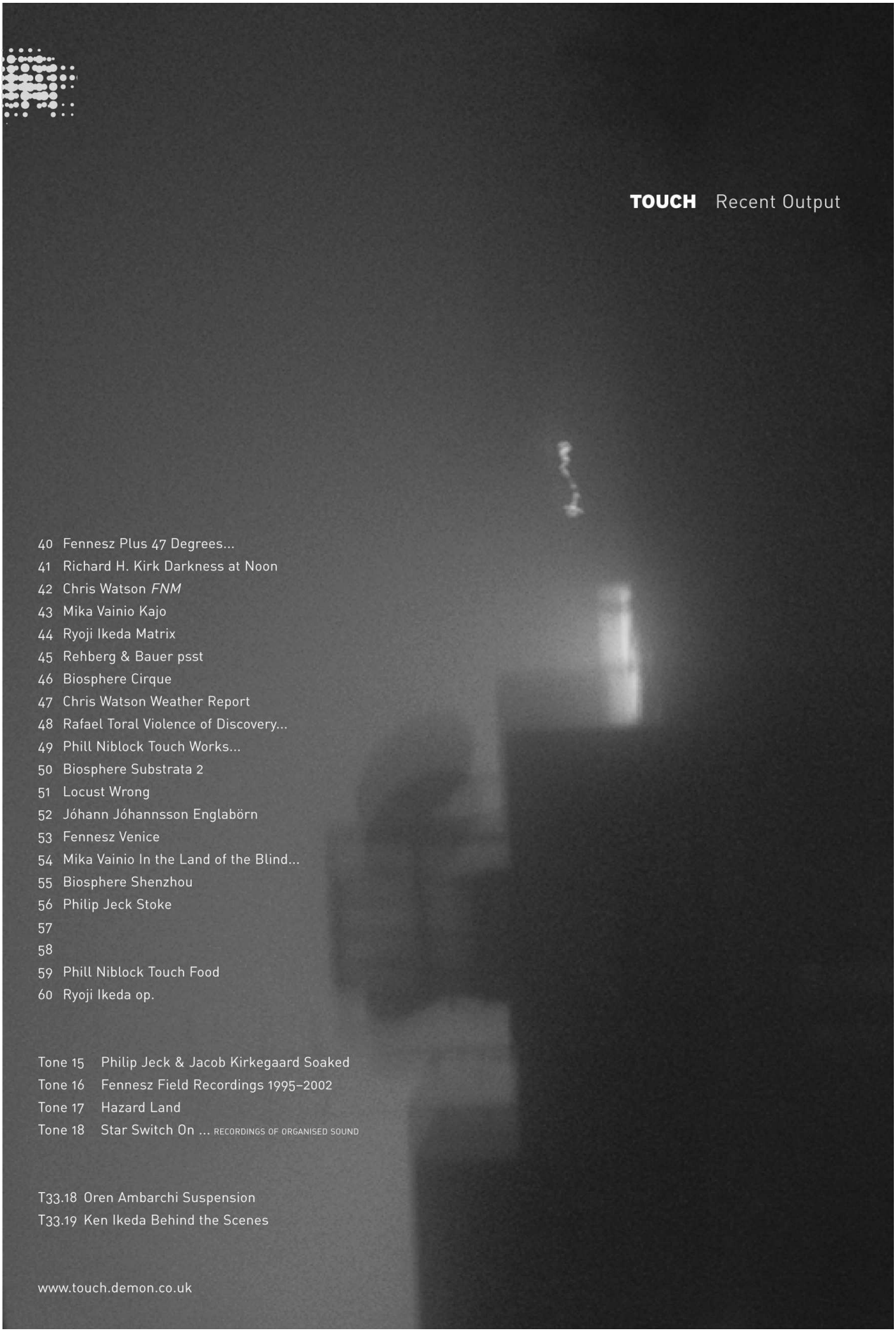
TOUCH Recent Output
40 Fennesz Plus 47 Degrees...
41 Richard H. Kirk Darkness at Noon
42 Chris Watson FNM
43 Mika Vainio Kajo
44 Ryoji Ikeda Matrix
45 Rehberg & Bauer psst
46 Biosphere Cirque
47 Chris Watson Weather Report
48 Rafael Toral Violence of Discovery...
49 Phill Niblock Touch Works...
50 Biosphere Substrata 2
51 Locust Wrong
52 Jóhann Jóhannsson Englabörn
53 Fennesz Venice
54 Mika Vainio In the Land of the Blind...
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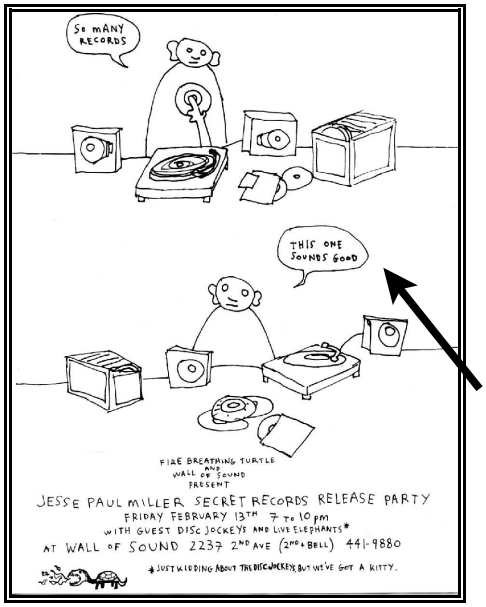
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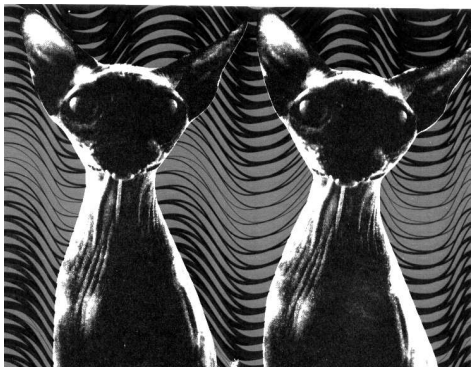
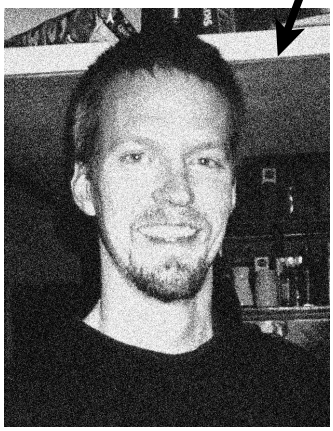
* JUST KIDDING ABOUT THE DISC JOCKEYS BUT WE'VE GOT A KITTY.

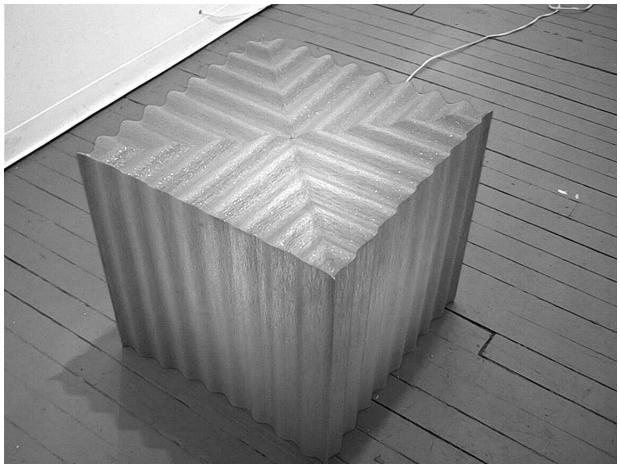


JESSE PAUL MILLER
CLIMAX GOLDEN TWINS
SCOTT COLBURN
MATT SHOEMAKER
DAVE KNOTT



Jesse Paul Miller

"My life's work is this giant machine..."



JESSE IS NOT EXCLUSIVELY A sound-artist or a musician, although he has worked in those areas - trained in Fine Art and graphic design in his home town of Colorado, he moved to Seattle some ten years ago and since 1997 has made something of a name for himself in the city's art galleries and installation areas with, amongst many other works, his 'Secret Records'. These nifty colourful art-objects are remoulds of old vinyl discs cast in resin mixed with foreign bodies and exhibited with old record players; they were something of a instant 'hit' with diverse audiences. For more on the Secret Records story, see Climax Golden Twins' interview; I was impressed enough myself to write a breathless review in issue 7, and to name-drop Jesse's work in a review of Philip Jeck's music, assuming that everyone had heard of him. When friends Rob Millis and Jeff Taylor sponsored him for materials and helped him to release a recording of the Secret Records, the multi-media tie-in added to the minor buzz and propelled Jesse into a position above the herd of ambitious art students. Modestly dismissing all this as so much Seattle-based 'hype' and figuring he simply got lucky, Jesse has constantly striven to move on from that position and not allow a 'gimmick' to become an albatross for him and his fertile creativity.

In any case, the Secret Records kind of grew out of what Jesse finds around him (his downtown apartment is packed with a rich organic growth of pickings and trash that Robert Rauschenberg would delight in). Picking up cheap LPs at garage sales, flea markets and house clearances, he sometimes strikes lucky and finds a rarity fit for auction on e-bay. Mostly, he discovers a mosaic of discarded popular culture that - when you hear enough of it - amounts to a quilt-like image of the underbelly of America's psyche. A double-CDR of his delvings into the world of one-dollar discs was one of my treasured parting gifts, a bizarre mix of surf music, polka tunes, sentimental organ music, patriotic songs, sound effects LPs...and you know the sort of thing.

Now tentatively reaching into the world of sound art, working with Pro Tools to manipulate environmental recordings, Jesse is realising one of his strengths in creating simple systems-based works - be they installations, group collaborations, or mixed media events, where the art is generated out of a set of rules, producing simple self-generating patterns of coincidence, or chaos. But far from being a rigid conceptualist, Miller is a resolutely eccentric thinker, trusting in his intuition and daydreaming approach to steer him to a better sea. Steadfastly refusing to commit himself to a single set of interpretations, or indeed a single working method, Miller continues to restlessly explore the strange world inside his head. I think the interview below - riddled with fascinating contradictions, sidetracks and meanderings - will give some flavour of what it's like in there.

Date: 25 April 2002
Location: A coffee house in downtown Seattle
Present: EP and JPM

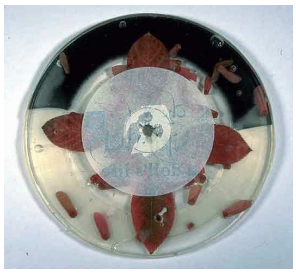
IT'S NO SECRET...MAKING THE SECRET RECORDS

EP Why did you come to Seattle?

JPM I came here because of music! I had friends here and I visited and a lot of music was happening here. It was in 1992, Nirvana and all that stuff. At that time the whole grunge thing brought a lot of young people. I think Seattle overall was just getting a lot of hype at that time. When I arrived here I realised that Seattle has a much more diverse music scene than just the rock and roll. And I just fell in love with it, I was mystified by it. There were a lot of creative people. Just the creative aspect of the city, and it's a more liberal city, it's West Coast, more liberal than Colorado. People are a little more respectful of diversity here - they're not gonna get in your face about their opinions or something. All those factors came together and I ended up here. Spent a couple of years here just working and not really knowing the right people. Finding the right people was really great! Scott Colburn, Rob Millis, Jeff Taylor, the guys in Sun City Girls, Matt Shoemaker, we're all like a family. Friends of mine who are artists, or artist-musicians. That's another thing I love about Seattle - it seems like everybody here plays music and does art! I think there's a healthy scene here.

EP When did you start making the Secret Records?

JPM It was part of living in the house with Scott Colburn, and having Rob and Jeff come by - they're both really encouraging towards me and my work. I took this record, I had this idea...I wonder if I could make a [record cast], what would it sound like? So I



took a Jonah Jones record, and I cast some resin...I just saw the grooves and I knew that resin, in the medical industry, you can cast very microscopic [details]. I've seen photographs, people can cast cells in resin. So I knew it was sensitive. Poured it in. Of course, it works! I put it on the turntable and it played, and it was all beautiful. Wow, look at this! I run downstairs and Rob Millis - they were down there recording in the basement of the house. So then Rob, he was encouraging and he said 'you should make more of these'. So I did. You know I think a lot of my art is...having those guys around me inspired me at the time. They're real important.

EP When was this?

JPM Oh, it was 1996-1997. I was also doing tapes. I made a little fake tape-trading label...and I was doing all the covers. It wasn't really a label, I was just interested in the idea of a label. I made a little catalogue. And that's actually how I met Rob and Jeff, was they sent me a cassette, the timing was perfect, that was the first thing that they'd done. [It was called] Skin Records. Yeah, I remember I even made funny like fake stickers! It was sort of my own private little art project.

EP And there was no music, was it just a [conceptual] label?

JPM No, there was [music]....there were other groups. Like my friend and I John, we did a sound collage called Algae. Chris Blue, who of all things is in The Presidents of the United States of America, he did some brilliant pop stuff, he had something that he gave me by a local artist. It was just this odd mix of noise and underground pop tapes...it was just who I had run into and met through the years I'd lived in Seattle. And asked 'em, do you wanna just list it [in my catalogue]? And if somebody wants it, mail it to em. It was just a trading project. And it wasn't really about me making business, it was about seeing what it was about by experiencing it. Nobody cared that much!

EP Didn't Rob and Jeff give you the money to get the resin for the Secret Records?

JPM Yeah, they funded me a couple of times. I would make the records in different batches and they gave me some money. I bought 70 dollars of the resin, and I made a handful of records. When the single was released, we did a limited edition of 375 copies. I made 25 Fire Breathing Turtle Secret Record 7-inchers, and they went in packages with the singles. We had a record release party at Wall of Sound, and they all [sold] that night! At the same time, Trevor Fairbrother who was curator for the Seattle Art Museum, had just called me and seen my records up at Wall of Sound. He said, 'do you wanna show these at the Seattle Art Musuem?' So the whole project just [took off]...there was a lotta hype around it! In Seattle, there's a lotta hype. Seattle's sort of a hype-sensitive kind of town. I've had a number of exhibitions. I started with one a little gallery called Bubba Mavis, and Wall of Sound Records. Then Project 416 was another, another big alternative gallery.

EP At this time you were putting foreign objects into the resin.

JPM For me the [records] were this great meeting-point. I grew up playing music and doing artwork, I was encouraged to do both. And I realised I'm not a musician, and I can apply art in doing graphic design. But for me the records were the perfect meeting of the two. I'm really interested in doing collage and painting and I like to do sculpture. You know, the sound...the object...the idea of casting...the idea that I could draw on something or paint on something and then drop it into this object that then made sound out of the layers. That really appealed to me. It said everything I wanted to say, all at once.

EP Any significance to the original record you choose, to make the original casting of?

JPM I always tried to find records that people didn't want! It ties in with my interest in finding records on as a collector - crummy records, 90-cent records, trash records. I ended up finding that they were fascinating, how they revealed this underbelly of American culture. But when I used one as a mould for a Secret Record, I always wanted to make the record not readily recognisable - a brand-name pop artist, or the artist that created the music. I was interested in specific records, like bad organ records, whale records, children's records. They hold these sounds that people don't usually hear, that are really fascinating. They're a time capsule of an era. A sector of culture. I think some of the most surreal records are children's records!

EP It would be so easy for a lot of artists to treat the source material with absolute contempt, and just say 'this is some piece of trash'. Jeff Koons...Mike Kelley, for example, I think is ever-so-faintly sneering at the [popular origins] of his sources. You're kind of embracing it, in a way.

JPM Yeah, I'm embracing it, but I'm also destroying the records in the process of casting. The record can survive the casting process, but usually they don't. That's maybe the sacrifice that they make. But I think it's beautiful.

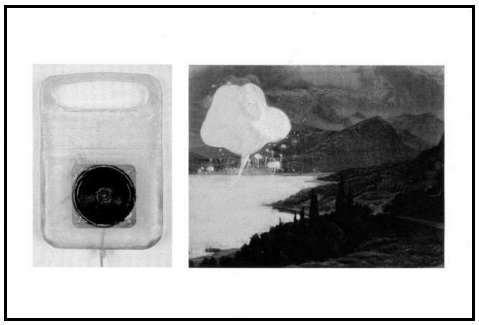
EP When did you start exhibiting them with turntables?

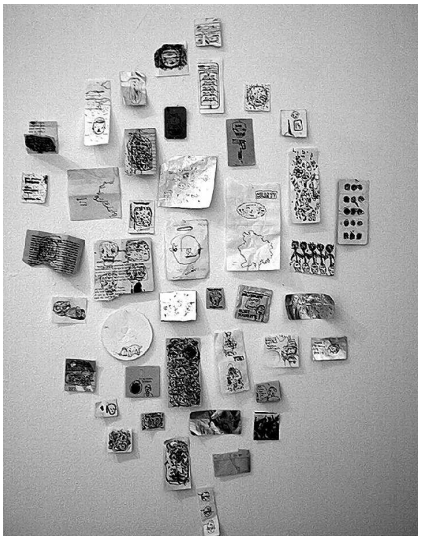
JPM Right from the start, I was preparing them with turntables. I had a show at Project 416 and I was putting them on turntables, and the people coming to the gallery could pick them up and just handle 'em and discover for themselves the sounds. I liked the whole idea of the person being in the situation. The breakdown between the art and the viewer, the viewer being able to interact and not be afraid of the artwork. I'm interested in those bigger issues of art and hierarchies. High art, low art. Why do you have to have an education to understand art? The money aspects of art. Those issues sort of tie in to some of the situations that I've worked with. I think it's who I am, it's in my personality.

CREATING SYSTEMS

JPM The environmental recordings I've been gathering for years. I'm treating them like a collage. This one piece I've been working on with a laser machine. Instead of dropping objects into this resin, with the new technology like ProTools and my Imac - I'm able to record the sounds from these places that I go and combine them in collage form. I like the visual aspect of ProTools and the layering that one can do. I don't really consider it music. It can reference music, and there are some parts of it that are like music. Then I make a CD. Again, this ties in with my interest in foraging. I go to thrift stores a lot. I found a laser machine that was made in the 80s, that projects a laser when you play a sound from a stereo. The laser makes a pattern that corresponds to the sounds, so you can see the sounds, much like any laser show. So I've made this multi-part piece, with the sounds playing through this laser. I have a frosted acrylic box, it hangs on the wall. It has a laser mounted in the back. The laser plays on the front and the insides, and it has headphones. Again, it's the access of hearing, between the seen and the heard. The person can watch this laser dance around and hear this collage of sounds. A lot of what I do is collage in some way. I guess it's layered - a lot of layers, a lot of fragmentary elements that I put together that are a lot of times, disparate. That reference other things. That reference other references! And I put them together in these small systems, that may or may not make sense to people, but I like to turn that around. Turn peoples' references around, turn technology around. Try and cause people to think twice about things that they take for real in the world.

EP You seem a very hands-on kind of artist. All the stuff I've seen - your drawings, castings, sculptures. Your approach to ProTools as well. That's a programme that requires some awareness of technology I suppose, but you seem very intuitive the way that you manipulate the





blocks [of sound] around. I think this is good, you're more like an old-fashioned craftsman.

JPM Yeah, I believe in that. I had a teacher who taught me...I was already intuitive, and he encouraged me. He said being intuitive is very important. I believe that. Whether it's dated or not, you can use new technology or old technology. [But] intuition - there's certain aspects of human behaviour, your soul or whatnot, that are universal. I'm interested in maintaining that old-fashioned universal approach to creating. I think there's art about technology which is [transient] - technology comes and goes, but if there's nothing about the human spirit in the art...I like the layers of history that one can present in a package, or a sculpture. I'm into that idea of the future and the past, and looking back at our times...I think about that, what are people gonna make of what people do now? Will anything come through that they can understand, or even care about? I also like making tons of historical references, and layering those as well as the materials. I just set up systems and situations and let other people decide. That's what I like, just taking all these technologies and putting them together, and not trying to control it all the time, letting things be. Our whole world is so quantified in science. I definitely believe that there's a lot more out there than what we see as the framework of our minds, and what's set up. And why not? Be a little absurd, or show those things to people, and twist what's natural for them a little bit, and cause them to wonder a bit. Wonder about what else is there. I like to create multi-part pieces that draw on a lot of different media and materials that can't necessarily be put into one kind of box. I'm always trying to cobble little bits of this and that together. I envision my life's work as this giant machine, that has all these little parts. Slowly building it, piece by piece. It has about seven thousand and 79 parts, and someday I'll get it right and I'll drive it down the street! It may take me 30 years or so.

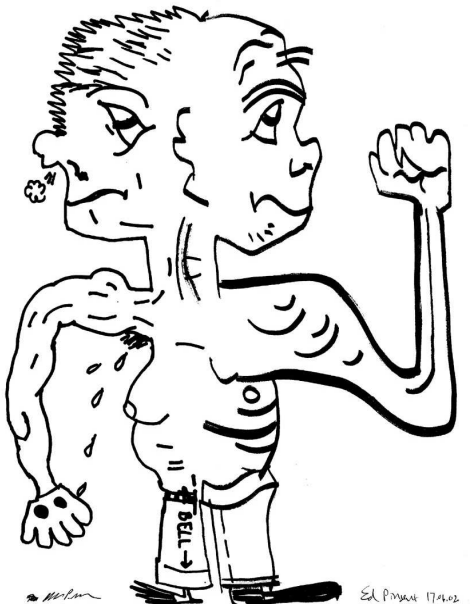
EP So in a way you're saying that each little project is part of the same thing, part of one big machine.

JPM I think so, yeah. At this point in my life at least, I find I have been saying the same thing over and over with different methods.

PERFORMANCES

EP You've done one or two performance based things, like when you project films in a live situation?

JPM I did one piece for an April Fool's day show, where I rented and wore a Cookie Monster suit...it was kind of playing around with the whole notion of authenticity...well, I'll just leave it at that! I rented a Cookie Monster suit, just the body, but it was called Cookie Muncher, it wasn't Cookie Monster! And Twerpy-Bird's head! It wasn't Tweetie-Bird. I made myself into a mutant! I was a living cartoon. Then I did a performance where I had an amplified guitar, I cut it in half with a saw, in the suit, while it was amplified. I remounted it on the wall and restrung it, so then people could play it. Again, it doesn't illustrate one specific point, it's a lot of things that I'm interested in, and it's a moment of action. It was in 1998. I think even that [performance] is sort of a collage - it's a time based collage, a performance or situation-based collage. I love surrealism, I love humour and cartoons, I love drawing from your childhood. That was what was around me, the media, when I was a child.



EP What about the film projections with the Climax Golden Twins music?

JPM Oh, my wife [Linda Peschong] and I, we call ourselves Lepus Labs, and we've been doing live film collages for Climax Golden Twins, and we've done about 25 different shows. All we do is set up two projectors. I'll prepare film loops, I've also made straight films through editing [old films] - I inherited a bunch of films from my uncle, so I use those as sources. A lot of stock photography or stock films. So I cut and paste, and manipulate these films and make loops, and we have two projectors. Linda has made slides - she runs the slide projector, and she makes slides and puts natural materials into them, drawings, bits of magazines, gels and whatnot. I've done shows where I'll draw [directly] on the film loop live, with a pencil. Yeah, it's fun. Every show is different. When [the band] begin, we start a living collage of light.

EP Apparently I hear that audiences are amazed, because occasionally you get a wonderful coincidence of music which matches the image. It fits together perfectly and you could never repeat it in a million years.

JPM Yes, I think the human mind has a need for order. People always say that and it just cracks me up. 'It went so perfectly! How did you guys do that?' It's like phasing or something. We are concerned about it, we are aware, and there are moments when we will start and end something [so that it synchronises], but within that [space] - let's say a timed film loop - it's randomness. So [it lies] somewhere between the utterly random and the utterly controlled. Sometimes they work amazingly well, sometimes they don't make any sense!

IN THE ART GALLERIES

EP What other art shows have you been in, that you've enjoyed?

JPM The Tornado show...that was in Chicago in February 2002. That was a collaboration with a lot of artists. Paul Davies, Greg Miller, Leslie Clay, Tyler Caffery. We did a big jam session essentially. Brought a lot of our different skills to this show. It was a three-dimensional architectural representation of wood flying around that was pulled up by a tornado. With the imagery from tornadoes - there was video that was manipulated, outputs of tornadoes, in a sequence. I took over a thousand samples of fragments and real tornado sounds from off of the Internet. Again, it was another system that I devised. Put them on nine CDs and they went to different speakers which were inside these boxes, hidden within this structure. As one went to the centre of the structure, it set off triggers which would turn on and off these different sounds. So it was always changing. There was a musical aspect.

EP You're finding it slightly ironic, that there's artists coming up now who look up to you as somebody who's made it?

JPM I've done what I did. I just do my thing and I made the art and I displayed it. I had enthusiasm for what I did. I think a lot of it was beautiful timing and I got some local recognition which put me in another place in other people's minds, because I was seen by a much larger audience. So I went through this process. I'm 34 years old and an artist who's going to Washington may be 27. They may be a peer or a friend of mine. They come up to me, they've seen something that I do. It's that whole blow-up effect of the media writing about me and making me into this art god that I'm not! I'm just somebody who's making art. And again, it's the hype in Seattle thing. It's not New York here - there aren't 10,000 artists at each other's necks. When one person gets recognition, it's like a blow-up for that one person...it's the big fish in the small pond. But it's really nice to have that success. To have worked and do my own thing for five years and not achieve some

recognition, that would have been frustrating...but I don't think [recognition] is necessary. What is important in making art? Is it the fame aspect, or is it what you say, or is it doing it? I don't have any choice, I'm hard-wired! I'd be doing it anyway, I'm a creative nutcase! You could just put me out in a field with some worms and sticks and some soil and I'll probably collaborate with it and we'll get something together! Nothing's gonna stop me from doing creative things!

EP Do you think sound art has the potential to be an interesting area?

JPM Sound art - it's all terminology. Sometimes I wonder if I'm even an artist. I just explore in my life. So for me a lot of that [terminology] is invalid. I'm not so concerned about knowing what the race is, and being in it, and knowing what the new thing is. It's nice to see sound-art being considered as artwork. Ever since someone started pursuing it, there have been good things to be said about it. Apparently - I've heard it's trendy right now in the art world. I know there are amazing artists. I've seen a number of things that blow me away, made by artists 30 years ago. I'm more influenced by contemporary composers than sound art, I have a bigger knowledge of them than I do of sound art. There's some crossover...John Cage is huge for me...he's all-encompassing. I really like Xenakis. I was just in Chicago. They teach sound as part of their arts curriculum. There was a guy showing me the drivers that David Tudor used to make amplified walls.

EP With John Cage, have you studied his ideas, read his books?

JPM I know the fundamentals about him. I don't have a deep knowledge of Cage and all his theories, but I love his idea of bringing Zen to the Western world. Why did all of a sudden someone get the stamp of bringing the ideas of Zen to the west? I think the only reason he is well-known is because the [cultural history] machine decided that Americans are ready for Zen, or for mysticism. There's a whole movement in the 1950s - the abstract expressionists, John Cage, and here in Seattle the North-West mystics - Morris Graves. Cage had an amazing mind, and there's so much that he has done. Some of the situations that he set up. That's what I like about John Cage, that he did continue to explore and push systems and ideas and materials. And his treatment of the piano; the physical aspects of dealing with sound, changing sound with an object.

EP What excites you about art generally?

JPM I like artwork that is big and grand, something that reaches physical extremes at certain points. I like art that pushes the viewer to a certain point. You can tell that the making of the artwork also [reveals] the limits of the maker, the artist. When one gets the combination of the really great mind, and the great resources - sometimes that can pile into a grand impression that I really enjoy. But I also love inventiveness. When I was in New York, somebody had done this piece where it looked as if they had completely carved out the wall. The wall was made of marshmallows and the inside was beautiful coloured oil paint! It was the transference, from the physical hardness of that wall, to the real softness and suppleness...I found it amazing. Nice piece, just spattered on the floor. Accessible and simple.

EP What's an example of art that takes the viewer to an extreme place?

JPM Damien Hirst. Charles Wray. Charles Wray pushes the viewer, only if you are willing to dive into the pool that he's made. His work has so many deep layers of meaning that one can delve into. I like his work, and what he writes or says about his work. It's not exactly about what people get out of his work. He's revealing his mind. Survival Research Laboratories was always one that I was impressed by. I remember seeing them and their work in San Francisco, a ground-breaking ceremony...I guess they'd emptied all the buildings, because of the life-threatening aspects of the sound. There's also a group called Semen which is post-SRL. I saw them at this festival called Burning Man. The environment was much more edgy! They were pointing this giant flame-throwing cannon right at the audience! It would blow flames, and there would be another robot and it would crumple something and pick it up. It's exciting, just the notion that you're in the hands of the person that's running this machine! It's terrifying, it's a pretty heavy-duty statement. But there's also excitement to that. There were moments of Burning Man where I had that extreme art experience - and not even out of the art world. They have a parade of these art cars, completely dangerous. One was this truck with a claw, holding another truck, and the thing was about to topple over and there was a big dragster blowing fire, and they're all making this loud noise and - I mean, my knees were shaking standing next to them! Watching them go by. Because of the whole implied danger of the situation.

ART IN SOCIETY - DON'T GET A JOB

JPM There are social statements I'd like to make. I'd like to make art about people being stuck in the system and having no hope. Whenever you're in an institution...that's a view I have of art, it may be or may not be informed by the institution, but it exists in the real world. It doesn't exist in the institution. Maybe it dives into the outer system, the world system, but it affects real people. I feel really strongly that art should not be an internalised thing for a certain group of people, that everybody should understand it and appreciate it, and have knowledge of it. Unfortunately, in America the public school system tends to castrate people's aesthetics. It teaches them to be good workers, but it also teaches 'we don't want you to be sensitive. We don't want you to understand this other side.' I had this idea once about setting up a situation...it's not that hard-edged, but there's a display window down the street called Seattle Rental Sales gallery. I wanted to call this [situation] '40-hour week' and hire a temporary worker to sit in that window as a piece. I was also thinking it might be myself sitting in that window! They would take these old label-dots and put 'em on rows of paper, all day long. 8 hours a day for 40 hours. The piece is obviously the document and the dots on the paper. But I've ended up doing that kind of thing for 8 hours [in real life], doing temp work! It's an honest reflection of what I've gone through in my life, a version of what I know is really going on. It's the industrial revolution, all over [again]!

EP What troubles you about the work situation, particularly?

JM Well, there's no hope in it. You have to be [mindless]. If you think about anything, in that situation, you go mad. There's also another beautiful side to it, which I've had. There's almost like a Zen state you can get into doing this repetitive or simple [task]...'take these pieces of paper and staple them together, put 'em in this sack'. The mindlessness of it. The way the whole system is. Unless you're a certain kind of person with a certain personality with a certain set of values, it's hard to enter it and do what you really want to do. You end up accepting the work.

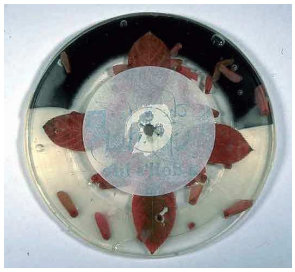
EP Did you take any action during the World Trade Organisation demonstrations?

JPM Not so much. I was more of an observer. I was there for it all, and I recorded it. I made audio recordings of the event and I watched it. I was a little bit more detached, but I was definitely into what the speakers had to say. That changed my views. That was a crazy thing. It wasn't linear at all, there were different groups of people flowing against each other. These kids with Nikes on, tearing down the Nike sign. Other kids, just there to create havoc. Breaking windows for no reason. And then activists saying 'don't do that. We have a cause!' It was very fragmented, the whole thing. Anarchists in their gas masks, doing this whole other thing. There were big marches. I just didn't know where I really stood on it, I think. It was definitely putting me on the spot, and made me think 'Ok, this is it, this is the real thing'. In a way, I chickened out. It was definitely that moment to stand up for what you believe in.

EARLY YEARS

JPM I went to the Colorado State University. I got a Bachelors in Fine Art and graphic design, but I also took an interest in sociology. I feel I have a wider variety of *modus operandi* for my work, and for my life, than somebody who just went to an art school. It was a good

situation, it was in the 80s, we had our group of people and we all did anything we wanted. At one point I booked a show, we took everyone on this one block that were friends of mine, and the whole audience got up on stage, and everybody played every instrument. The club shut us down and kicked us all out because it upended the notion of a 'band' and all that. I painted, I made these sound collages with my friend John...it was nice to be in a small town and not have to worry about [imitating others]: you can't do this because that guy's done it. There's this game that you have to play. That guy's beaten you to it, beaten you to that achievement! I guess there was also a lot of post-punk [feeling], a big part of my life. There was also a friend of mine Lance Barber [doing] Radio Zero, a midnight radio show. He really informed me about all underground music. He got every underground music-scene record and played all night! I still have tapes...Throbbing Gristle, Killdozer, Minutemen, Husker Du, all sorts of stuff. I've always been thirsty for learning about music. It's funny, but a lot of the time I don't have the same thirst for art. I think I'm almost better informed about music than art! A lot of it [underground music] is prophetic...if you listen to the Minutemen today, a lot of it holds up. What they have to say is still a warning, stop before it's too late. If we're not careful we're gonna ruin everything. That's what I get out of it. I think that's my generation. Now there's another younger group of people that are coming in and it's become so [banal], there's none of this critical voice that is in music any more. Very cryptic to me, with the Internet, music is like it's all internalised, self-referential, inside jokes...people have these little weird scenes online. The rave culture is a very internalised culture...none of it has social critique, there's no social critique, which I thought was very healthy. One side of my family's from San Francisco - I was instilled with a lot of that, like you must question the system around you, especially in America. It's a great country, but you always have to fight for what you want here, because if you don't somebody else will take it away from you. It's natural evolution in a way. So I think social critique in music and in art is healthy, even if somebody's statement is full of holes, even the fact that they make the statement is good, because Americans- we're all hypocrites. I want to be good for the environment, and I can do things I want to do like not buy MacDonalds, or not support this brand of clothing. Then again of course I'm still a hypocrite - by not essentially dropping out and being at one with the natural system one to one. I'm still purchasing goods, but at least I'm doing one part of it, and I apply that to what I see, the social critique.



EP The important thing is to at least ask the questions.

JPM Yes, always question what's around you. Part of my life I think - my mission statement is - even if they're absurd questions, just to set up a situation where people ask questions. That's a huge part of my art. It's very simple. It's sort of general and sweeping and broad in some way, but it's simple and I think it's universal. Question what's around you, don't be afraid to be critical of things. It's a healthy thing to do.

I LIKE THE CRYPTIC

EP You said before that you kind of like this cryptic element to the work you do...the art doesn't reveal itself immediately to the viewer, and I think that's good thing to follow up.

JPM Yeah, I do like the cryptic...I like the whole process of discovery in seeing art, and I think a lot of my process in making it is that I like to make it accessible to people. The act of discovery, the simple thrill of discovery. Y'know, I'm not trying to change the world, I'm just interested in presenting that spirit of excitement. Putting an object out there, or a situation that maybe you can find some inspiration in. Maybe turn a leaf over and see something. I love nature, I love living in the North-West because I get to go out in nature and to me, nothing beats it for teaching you lessons in some way. There's definitely that influence in my life and in my art. Whether it comes through or not, that's the cryptic thing - it's what's in somebody's head. Sometimes I think I'm just showing pictures of my mind! *Come into my head! It's kind of a strange place...a little bit lop-sided, you know!* I think a lot of people's heads are like that! Everything that I do, the art and life thing...your life is a sculptural entity, and the objects or the things that you do are markers in this larger flow. I'm not saying my life is a giant art piece, but I do drag so much of what's around me in my life into my work, so that it becomes blurred. Getting caught up in the tide-pool and the stream of thoughts. I like jumping and pointing from one reference to the other. People have canned [thoughts], boxed references that have been built up around them. [Ideas] that have been given to them, taught to them, and that they take as very solid. Really, I think references are all subjective. A person with thought and exploration can create all sorts of amazing pathways and conceptual structures, by understanding and knowing references, or by not knowing references. I think a lot of what I'm doing is multiple parts, these multiple references that are strung together, and I randomly leap from one to the next. I can see it in my mind. It's a more holistic approach, and not a hierarchical approach. I don't believe in a lot of the hierarchies - that people, because they have money or they have success or power, that they're better than somebody else. I don't believe in that. Even though it doesn't come out in my art, as a human being I think it does inform how I make work. □

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Path Of Resonance

Dave Knott interview

DAVE KNOTT IS A MUSICIAN, A COMPOSER, an improviser; a builder of unique and wonderful instruments, a maker of more conventional instruments (he has built his own guitars); an explorer of the environmental sounds in his local landscape; and a qualified music-therapist. His unusual musical endeavours can be heard should you care to purchase the CD *Natura Naturans* (Anomalous Records NOT 1), which is less a fully-realised musical work than an edited documentary record of his sound-sculpture installation. These stringboards - comprised from careful, labour-intensive assemblage of pieces of found wood and prepared strings - were installed at Eric Lanzillotta's performance space in Seattle, and recorded there in 1997. The CD is worth checking out, even if it isn't a totally satisfying listen, because you simply don't get exotic sounds like this anywhere else. Dave has since expanded the idea of installing his stringboards in an art gallery space, and started to take them outdoors. Intrepid explorers in Seattle may want to try and track down his outdoor installations, although it has to be said they are not easily recognised, once found. However, I very much like his idea of intervening in the environment in a harmless and unobtrusive way, something that actually can make a considerable difference to life. Dave is also a member of the informal guitar quartet, along with Rick Bishop of Sun City Girls, and the Climax Golden Twins, whose improvised works as Messenger Girls Trio are scheduled for issue as an LP by Anomalous Records.

Dave and his music are all about compassion, and a species of empowerment. He really believes music can help human beings, which is why (through some personal sacrifice and considerable devotion to his studies) become a professional music-therapist. Even though I reserve the right to remain somewhat sceptical about the 'healing properties' of music, there's no denying Dave Knott's commitment. Another touching example of Dave's love of humanity is demonstrated in the picture on the next page, which shows a young fellow named Isaac Severin Majcher making a stringboard of his own in the Listening Sanctuary at the August 2002 Art In Nature Festival. 'He is quite the young composer having already recorded a CD and plays his own music on piano all the time' reports Dave. 'He didn't stop until he filled that piece of wood with strings.'

Date: 19 April 2002
Location: Assimba, an Ethiopian Restaurant in Central Seattle
EP = Ed Pinsent
DK = Dave Knott

HIS EARLY IMPROVISATIONS

EP I was interested to read that you've improvised with Jeph Jerman a few years ago, in Seattle. Were you improvising before that?

DK Yeah, I was...improvisation has been my fundamental way that I've enjoyed playing music. I started out playing guitar in my bedroom, just making stuff up, listening. But the first time that I used improvisation in performance was with a group called Greasy. I should give you one of those records. That'll blow your speakers out!

EP When was that?

DK That started I believe it was in '93, we started playing together, played together for a couple of years, '93 to '95.

EP It was quite loud and noisy music?

DK Yes, loud, noisy, unkempt music!

EP What did you play, electric guitar?

DK Yes. I also started bringing in other things, too. Whatever I could scrounge up and make, from whatever I could find. During that time period I started a series of instruments that are dangerous to play. I took some old

piano strings and made a giant Kalimba out of it, that when you played it, it would pulp your fingers at the ends. You'd get bloody fingers. Definitely painful to play. There was another one, I made it from one of those exercising machines. I call it the Nordaphone. I put piano strings on the bottom - it's like a giant, amplified acoustic pick-slide. Whenever your feet went back and forth on the tracks you hear this deafening [hacking sound]. So I attached a contact mike to the front so I could plug it into a guitar amplifier, and I used that at a couple of performances with Greasy.

EP Must have been quite a big device...cumbersome to carry around.

DK It was, yes. Well, it would fold up flat. The handles would fold down.

EP Did you have an audience for this noise?

DK Yes, people were interested in it. The singer's name was James Guzman, we started out just playing in his basement. Mitch Monetti and Erik Major were the other members of the group, and people would come over and we played three or four nights a week. We had a house in the U-District of Seattle, near the University, and it just kind of became a place for people to go and hang out and listen to us play, or come in and play along. But the four of us, the core group Greasy, we were always there, making a loud noise. And then we decided that, since we were having so much fun and people were starting to come over, just interested in hanging out and listening - why not perform? We had had the idea that maybe some songs would emerge, but we never really stopped improvising, so...some forms would recur because they were melodic or harmonic ideas that one of us had brought to it. It would sort of coalesce and we would return to it as a form. So we just started playing at parties mostly. There was a space in Belltown, not far from Wall of Sound, called the Belltown Theatre Center, and we played there a few times. We played there on New Year's, '95 - '96, brought in the New Year with a guest hostess Detonator Beth. And one of the tunes we did was an Alice Coltrane song, 'Journey in Satchidananda', and it made it onto the record.

EP So when you did improvisation, did you have a jazz influence; did you know about other improvisers, in Europe or America?

DK Yeah, I had studied jazz guitar a little bit. My first year in college, '86, I studied jazz guitar from a guy Bill Bisecker, he was a studio musician in D.C. And I took that for about a year, and I wanted to do something else and so I decided to study classical, and that's when I moved to Idaho and studied classical guitar there, for half a year. Then I was disillusioned with that too, and eventually gave it all up, and went to join the army for a few years. I was driving a tractor-trailer around New England.

EP So how did you get to Jeph Jerman from Greasy?

DK Well, I moved into a house on 14th Street just down the street from The Artificial Limb Company. The Anomalous Records performance space was, at that time, located above The Artificial Limb Company. I was introduced to Jeph Jerman by Amy Denio. I think we realised we had a pretty simpatico relationship with sound and music. He was doing a weekly improvisation series with Aaron Wintersong, a saxophone player, and he and Aaron invited me to come down to this. I was really hard-core playing with Jeph.

EP Now Jeph is quite a quiet player, isn't he? Has he always been quiet, or was he noisier then? I just mean, in a performance situation, the audience has got to be fairly quiet...

DK He's also played drums in Blowhole, and he's also played with Wally Shoup, Project W, Brett Arnold, he's opened for Sonic Youth here in Seattle...and even Jeph's orchestra, the orchestra that we play in is called the Animist Orchestra, and it uses all natural materials. But even with that it can get fairly loud. But I would say yeah, it tends to be on the more quiet side! Jeph's playing is very dynamic so it can range from whisperingly quiet - almost still to really really LOUD!

EP You've also done some directed improvisation work, with untrained musicians?

DK What really interests me are people that say 'Oh, I can't play music'. That's one of the great things about these is that I'll put a resonant pan-lid in their hands and give 'em an instruction, 'OK we're gonna play these, and the way that we're gonna play it is based on your breath cycle. So I want you to take a deep breath and at the point where your inhale turns to an exhale, gently tap.' These lids that I've selected out from Goodwills and Salvation Armys. Then I'll instruct them to listen, to continue breathing normally, and listen until the sound of their pan lid is completely gone. And then when they've lost the sound of their lid in their ear, take another breath, and let that be the guide for striking the lid again. Actually, the night that I presented that string quartet, I did that with the audience. I passed out about 40 lids! So people were situated throughout this entire auditorium, each doing this little piece. What came out of it was really interesting. For me, I hear a shift in the attention in the room. Not only are people shifting their attention to the sound of their lid, but also there's an attention to their own breath. Because the reason that they're supposed to strike this thing, or the guide for striking it, is their own breath. I'm really fascinated by that. Instead of the idea let's be creative and let's make something, how you can pare something to a physiological process. To me it makes it very utilitarian. Everyone is breathing, so everyone can do this. If you can breath and you can hear, then you can do this piece.

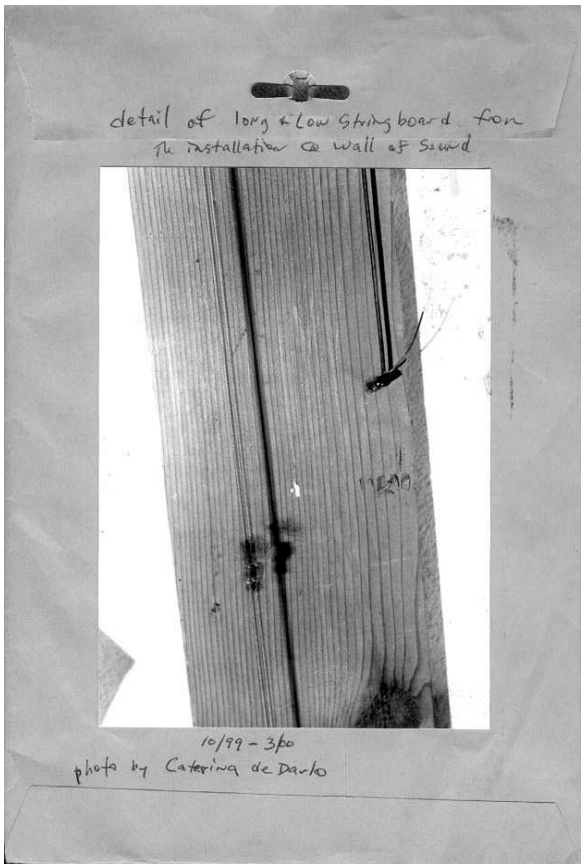
EP So tell us more about this guitar quartet...how has that been going? It's you, The Climax Golden Twins and Rick Bishop?

DK I guess it must have been around December of 2000 I started playing with Jeffery Taylor, and he lives close by to me so I just walk across the Aurora Bridge and go over there and play guitars with him. Our interest in the whole thing started out very simply. It was just kinda goofin' around. It started because Jeffery asked me to do some work on one of his guitars. I did a little work on it, brought it back over and then we started playing. 'We should do this more often! This sounds really good!' So Jeffery told Rob Millis about it, and Rob started coming over so it was a trio. And then we got Rick involved in it, and so we were a quartet. We feel like with the quartet...we've arrived. It was about March or April 2001 that the four of us were playing regularly. The goal is, once a week we all get together. Thursday night is usually our lodge night, and whoever's in town, we try and make it happen. I don't know how the other members feel about it, but for me it's been a really important social element in my life, but it's also been a way I've processed a lot of the work that I'm doing. I'm working with people that are dying, and I sometimes develop really incredible relationships with these people that are near the end of their life. I've found that I use that group as a way of letting things out. I also write songs for people, and help people write songs, and used that guitar group as a sketch-pad. Listen to what other people add to it, and then steal their ideas, make 'em my own.

EP And Eric wants to put out a record of you?

DK Yeah, that's really exciting. It's turned into a lumbering beast now. We've listened to at least 15 mini-discs, which have as many as 70 or 80 tracks on them. So each one is very, very dense, full of what I've selected out as pseudo-prime material. We've listened back to all that, at least 20 hours of recorded material, and from that we've produced a four-CD collection which we each have copies of now and we're each making individual notes of what we think should be on the record. The final step in the democratic process is for Scott Colburn to tell us all to get lost, and he's gonna make the record for us! We did one recording session at Scott's, with his amazing set-up, so it's all really crisp and sounds really good. But what's nice is that we have so much material that we're gonna be able to make a really beautiful something!

WHEN I MADE MY FIRST STRINGBOARD...



DK When I made my first stringboard, I had lived in a different house that had a piano, an old funky piano, that was broken and out of tune. We actually had two pianos at one time. I was calling around trying to get used piano strings. I ended up talking to this really amazing kind-hearted older blind man, who repaired pianos. I told him about making instruments and he said 'Well, do you want an old piano?' 'Sure, why not?' We requisitioned a creamery truck from the creamery in Pike Place market, and went out to pick this old broken piano up, and brought it home. So I'd been playing with doing [piano] preparation, sticking things into the strings. You can't really haul a piano around with you to play with other people, so I'd been trying to figure out how I could make a portable one of those. At the same time I was working at Dusty Strings in Fremont, and got a box of tuning pins that were supposed to be used for a dulcimer. But they were 2/1000ths of an inch too small and they couldn't use them, so they were gonna throw 'em away, so I saved 'em. And I started putting tuning pins on pieces of plywood. So I'd made my first stringboard, and discovered different ways of putting the strings on there, and putting fishing sinkers on there, and fishing lines. Sort of a confluence of things. I'd met Ellen Fullman at that time too, the maker of the long string instruments, and had started listening to Derek Bailey more, with bigger ears. All these things. I took one of the string-boards down to play with Jeph. Whatever I was working on, or had made, I would just bring it down for the Thursday session. I had a little baby cello there I was playing at the time.

EP There's a story that you once amplified an entire wall full of objects...sounds very interesting...made it into a big noisy thing. What was that about?

DK When I brought in one of the stringboards [to the Anomalous space], Eric Lanzillotta was there every week. We did the improvisation series. He saw the stringboard and asked me to make an installation. He was open to me building it over time. Every couple of weeks I would work on a new board and bring it in, and attach it to the wall. So it just kept growing. Pretty soon, the hall, the bannisters, the doors, the window-sills, everything became part of this installation-instrument.

*EP So, the CD that came out (*Natura Naturans*) is like a document of the installation?*

DK I guess it is a document of the installation that was there at the Anomalous space. I guess it was also a document of the playing styles or the techniques that developed playing those boards. Because each one is so unique, the way that each one is played is informed by that specific piece. I shoved a rock under a few strings as a bridge, and one of the textures that I would play with was holding one of the strings that crested on that rock, and play it back and forth slightly so that it would rattle across that rock, and you would get a pitched scraped sound. That was that one feature of that one board. So the recording is a document not only of the installation, but of many of the playing techniques that developed to interact with those specific boards.

EP I have to say that it's very pleasant to listen to, but the music seems a little bit shapeless. I understand what you're saying about the different techniques and so on, but I'm trying to connect the musical ideas with the actual constructions, and I'm not quite getting there. I can see that you have quite strong ideas, but I'm not clear how they're being manifested through these instruments. It seems to be more about the process, than the music.

DK Well, when I listen back to it, I can hear developments of ideas that emerge across boards. If a general sounding of all the strings of a board happens at one point, and then I may move along to another board and be doing something very small, very quiet, and then return to an earlier idea of sounding all those strings. Or if there is a certain tonality that came out of one board and I started hearing it as I'm playing with another board farther along the wall, I may return to that tonality because I've just discovered it again in this other place. But it's very much improvisation-oriented. I didn't have any deliberate form in mind other than spending a good amount of time with them. You might have heard it differently if you'd heard the original recording, because the way it was originally recorded was Eric Lanzillotta putting a bunch of condenser microphones around the space, and I played for 90 minutes, with a little break between each side. But in order to fit in on the CD, I had to cut. I've heard similar critiques from other people, that it works better as a background soundscape, it's good work music - Doug Hare told me that. Put it on and do things. My mom likes to listen to it, when she has tea parties! 'Cause it'll get really quiet, but without realising it, the volume level goes up, dynamics go up, and suddenly something demanding is happening. And then both her and her friend's attention will be turned to it. They'll realise that they're listening to something.

EP Do you have a clear idea of what you set out to do, when you were building these devices? Any particular aim in mind? Did you just think it was a nice thing to do, or because you wanted a portable version of a piano as a stringboard?

DK It's more an exploration of that tonality, it's an exploration of prepared string sounds. Beyond that...you've got what I think of as a substrate for sound. A place that you can not only turn your attention to, but you can turn other people's attention to, as an object that's designed and intended to be a sounding surface. So then you can put objects onto that surface and in my mind, it turns the attention to the object in a different way than not having them attached or affiliated with the board. So that's where you get the Spaceboard, with all the little things attached to it; not only do they change the sound of the strings on the board, but they become an object for sound exploration in themselves. Like the lid, that's a bridge for two strings, but when you slide it along underneath the strings, the tension of the strings pressing on it, and the motion of the pan-lid moving slowly, creates the friction that allows continuous squeaking sounds.

STRINGBOARDS - INSTRUMENTS , SCULPTURES OR INSTALLATIONS?

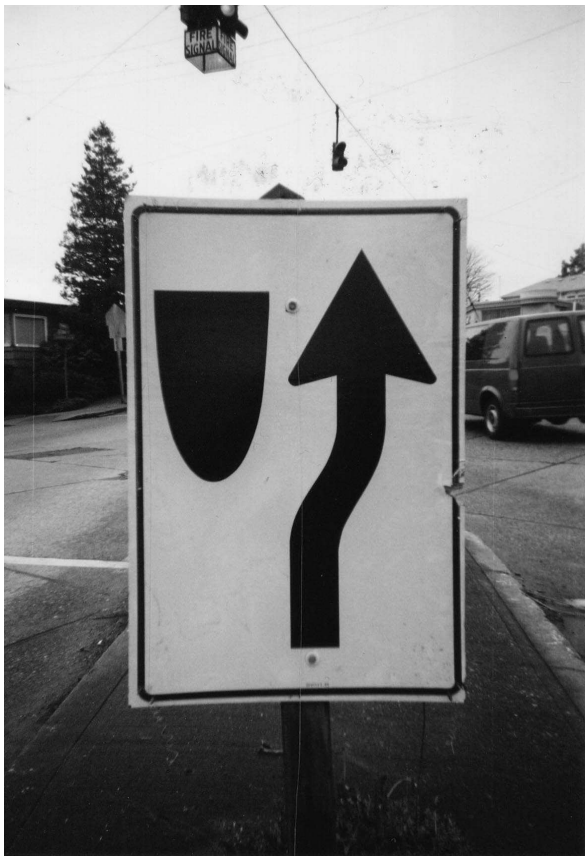
EP I notice in the CD, you've just got one photograph in the inlay tray of what the instruments look like. Are they meant to be seen as sculptures, or semi-art objects, have an inherent beauty?

DK I have respect for building things that are finely-made. I went to a guitar-making school in Phoenix in 94. That was part of the inspiration for beginning to sound objects...hearing these pieces, which started with raw wood, and just in the building phase, sanding things, I realised that the resonance was there before it was constructed into final instruments. So this wood has a property, that there's tone in the wood, and that tone can be appreciated for music at that stage. But I think for the stringboards...obviously I'm a bit attached to them and so I don't consider them to be pieces of cast-away junk. Once I've made one I do have a sense of it being special in some way. I don't really necessarily conceive of them as a gallery piece. There is a series that Daniel Zezelj and I have worked on *. I constructed the pieces and put frames on them. He painted the boards, and then I drilled holes and installed strings on them. So it's a collaboration. They're like playable paintings, or painted stringboards. I think those do transcend the every-day, because there's been such attention to them, both visually and aesthetically. They are instruments. Those I think I see as art-objects. I guess I do consider each of the stringboards I make as art objects. There's definitely a lot of attention that goes into them, and often there's a fine detailing that goes into each one that you will only find if you really

study it very closely. The beauty of this tiny little section of the stringboard that has been sanded to a really fine degree. So when you see the whole board, you see this rough thing with printed numbers on it, and pieces hanging off of it.

EP That sounds like something that gives you some satisfaction. The craftsmanship involved in doing it, not necessarily arriving at a finished item, but just the process that you go through to get there.

DK Part of the reason why I like them being in an unfinished state is that I found that people have more of a tendency to want to engage something. They're more likely to reach out and play something if it appears to be unfinished, or just sort of thrown-together. If something is really finely-made...of course, it's cutting the population into different categories. Some people that will refuse to play something because it looks too funky, right? Or they just think of music as, 'Oh no! I'm a different kind of musician! I'm a fine musician!' And those are people that are already involved in their own musical pursuit, and I'm not sure I can reach them anyway. But I'm more interested in the average public.



EP We (EP and Jesse Paul Miller) went to visit your sculpture on the traffic island, after we left your house last night...we had a pluck of it. It was quite a surreal moment, standing there with these cars going by, plucking this string. I also thought...unless you knew it was there, you wouldn't go up to it and start plucking the strings. It was kind of a cryptic object...and I thought there was poetry in that somewhere. Have you done other things like that, where you just leave a strange sculpture there and hope for the best?

DK (chuckling) I'm not sure if I should make a public admission of this!

EP It occurred to me as we were standing there...what are these motorists going by to make of us? Two guys...committing a lewd act!

DK (still thinks this is hilarious)...a lewd act of listening! I've worked it out that I did a public service for this, because the board when I found it was broken off and lying on the street. I repaired it and put it back....put it back with some subtle modification and enhancement.

EP A step of gently intervening in your environment...?

DK I think so. I appreciate your interest in these things, putting some thought into it, because to me a lot of it comes from a sense that this needs to be done. And I do it, and I try and make some sense out of it, otherwise I would be doing things all the time. That's my goal. Someday when I retire I can act from intuition all the time. Another thing that's interesting about that is the feedback I've got. I have a little distribution list where I send out, periodically, a little e-mail to people about what I'm doing or some show that's coming up, or some event that I did. Or when I made my Music Therapy presentation last weekend at Portland, 'therapeutic applications of making and playing experimental musical instruments'. So when I did this installation thing...I get feedback from people that go and try it out. It's a way for me to engage in my environment and to feel more present, I guess. I feel like I'm living, somehow, in a way that feels right with my intuition. And by hearing from other people, that interact with it or get something from it, I guess it reaffirms my efforts. I got a note back from one of my mentors, Stuart Dempster. He taught me how to play the didjeridu, and he was the sponsor of the original Sonic Tools project, which was working with homeless and at-risk kids, in summer of '98. He went and found the stringboard, and he called it the 'Aurora Narrow Arrow Island Stringboard'! A few years ago, he created this guide called *The State of Washington as a Musical Instrument*. It's a guide to resonant spaces, interesting aural aspects of the state of Washington. One of the things that's included is a cistern in Port Townsend, at Forth Worden, an underground cistern. Stuart sent me this note back, he described finding it and he described playing it, and he had a similar feeling from what you said, that it was kind of a surreal feeling of having cars whizzing by in both directions, and your attention is on this sign. He also said something about trying to play the instruction of the sign! And he added it to his guide. I'm really encouraged by its inclusion in that document.

PSYCHO-PHYSICS AND MUSIC THERAPY

EP Have you done any research into the history of the vibrating string? I mean from Pythagoras onwards; I know that some musicians are interested in that history, Tony Conrad in particular; and I think Harry Smith looked into it, because he researched the work of Robert Fludd, the English antiquarian, and his idea of the monochord.

DK I think my interest is more outside of the physics of sound, and more the 'psycho-physics', maybe - if that's a word! I've become really interested in Pauline Oliveros and Deep Listening. I attended a Deep Listening retreat in Santa Fe, Rose Mountain, in August of 2000. It was impressive. For me the most profound aspect of it was- from the evening sitting meditation until the next day after our Deep Listening time with Pauline - we would spend every evening without speaking. Even when we were done and we were back in our tent, there was no speaking from the evening meditation till the Deep Listening sit the next day.

EP Was that a condition of attendance?

DK Yes, it was. Spending all this time communally together - instead of a focus on expression, it was a focus on receptivity. And that really touched me in a lot of ways. I had an emotional experience from it on the fourth day, a lot of feelings came up that I had no idea that I had. One in particular was that I had this overwhelming melancholy. This sense that if everyone could do this together, a lot of our conflicts would not exist any more. Simple things - like eating the meal together and no-one saying anything - you began to be able to communicate with people without spending so much time with language - it became clear just by gesture, eye movements, just sharing space with people, what others' needs were, and there was a sense that you could help people meet their needs without a lot of negotiation, [language] just became secondary. We also created, as part of our requirement for the workshop retreat...everyone got to make their own piece. And for my piece I created an Animist processional. So, in the spirit of Jeph's Animist Orchestra, I had all the participants, everyone involved in the retreat, collect their own natural materials that they were interested in for their sound quality, and then instructed them to sound the materials as quietly as they could. Using one of Pauline's sonic meditations, to walk as if the bottom of your feet are ears, or have ears. Had them move into this space from outside, make a big circle where Pauline and Ione and Heloise Gold, the three workshop-retreat leaders, sat - and then make a big circle, stop, do a louder sounding with the materials, and then quietly process, carry the procession back outside and then return the materials to the natural environment.

EP Hmm. So how does this connect to psycho-science, or whatever it was you called it?

DK Well, I think of the vibrating string as a physical phenomenon; I guess 'psycho-physics' is thinking of the psychology of vibration. Which to me, gets into these areas of where does music come from, how do you make music, what does music mean, is there meaning in music, how does that meaning get there? Is it made up by each individual that's receiving it? Can the instigator, the expressor of the sound, put meaning to anything? I don't have any answers to these questions, by the way! I'm really interested in the physical properties of a vibrating string, it's actually the foundations of music therapy. Its earliest foundation is of a Pythagorean type; the belief that music has a therapeutic value. There's been a whole lot more scientific research done since the 1950s, but the theories are probably as old as time itself.

EP Along with this therapeutic side that you're exploring, would you say there's a spiritual side? In one article, you've spoken about 'sacred moments'.

DK I'm really fortunate right now. I started college in 1986 and I finished my Bachelor degree in 2001, and I finished my degree in music therapy. I'm fortunate that I'm able to practice music therapy in a setting where people are dealing with issues, many grief issues, because some people that come to this Facility come there to die. And some of them come there to get a new lease on life. They may be depressed, or they've just started a new drug regimen. The facility is the Bailey-Boushay House and opened in 1992 as an AIDS care facility but in recent years it has broadened its mission to include individuals undergoing cancer treatment, organ transplant and other critical care needs. It is really a prototype in its use of what it calls 'The Healing Arts' in its overall Care Plan for every resident. And its mission has broadened since then, because they've had such success with the drugs that people are living longer, and they're able to live independently for longer. But people still get flare-ups of difficulties or medication that gives their bodies a hard time. Some of them have to come in for a tune-up and I see these as opportunities to remind people of the importance of music in their lives. I've noticed that a lot of times when people get sick, they will forget the things that give them strength. Their mind gets to work on the model of illness, rather than the model of life. And I think that music is part of people's model of life, so when they forget about that and become ill, they can forget how important music is to them. Or if they literally are dealing with death, it may be really important for them to remember a song that was important to them when they were younger, it will often bring back memories of important areas of their life that maybe they hadn't been spending time with, or needed to revisit. Things that can help them tie up loose ends before they move on.

EP I've got to admit it sounds very positive, but I hope you can understand there are people who might be sceptical of some elements of that. I suppose because it's in a medical setting. We can agree that music has a positive affect on people. But playing devil's advocate for a second, I would tend to associate what you're describing with the lunatic fringe of something happening out in Los Angeles or somewhere. Homeopathic medicines, and so on.

DK Well, it's actually quite an established field with an every increasing role in hospitals, nursing homes, out patient clinics, and other traditional medical sites as well as public, private and community music school settings. Music Therapy as a discipline was established in 1950 in this country (www.musictherapy.org) But there is also Music Therapy happening in countries throughout the world - Europe, Africa, Canada, Asia. There is even a British Society for Music Therapy. The reason why I feel that music therapy is an important part of a treatment team, especially and critically in a medical setting, is that the medical model has really been focussed on death as the enemy, and about keeping people alive. Because of that focus, it's done a really good job dealing with symptoms, with staving off death, but it hasn't really dealt with the fact that people are human beings. Just as you and I come from our completely unique backgrounds, when you go into a hospital there's a sense in which that goes away; or they don't have a way of dealing with the fact that we're humans with feelings and emotions and likes and dislikes, that have to endure all this. One of the treatments for cancer is chemo-therapy, and radiation therapy; and these are very hard for people to go through, they're incredibly difficult. It's a poisoning of the body that they have to take, all kinds of secondary symptoms come from it, from losing your hair, to feeling like you're burning up inside. There are very inhumane techniques for dealing with what's going on with someone's life. And if you have music as part of the treatment team, there's another person that is interacting with that individual, whose role is not to cause pain or to poke them or to wake them up to take their temperature or give them some more bad news. It's someone that's there on their behalf, to help them to experience music as fully or as deeply as they want to and are able to. It's basically having an advocate for them. Some people would argue that social workers would do that, but I think that's devaluing the importance of music, that music has in people's lives. You know, it's interesting that after the events of September 11th, what was happening around the U.S., possibly in other areas, there were people that were having spontaneous singing groups. They would get together and sing, people would get together and make art. It was reported in the press, I remember I saw newspaper articles about it and heard it on the radio, and there were events here in Seattle for that purpose. But it's interesting to me how, when a crisis such as that happens, how people out of necessity turn to music, and art, as way of processing and dealing with these things. At a time when the first thing that people think of when you're cutting [funds] is to cut money for music programmes. But what is it that really rescues people? In their greatest need? When all the smoke clears, what do people want to do? They want to sing. They want to sing together. I think that when people have reached a point where there's nothing else that's going to help them, instead of just throwing in the towel and saying you're done for, OK, just take a bunch of morphine until you're gone...a music therapist can help that person deal with some of their last needs.

EP To take you off another tack. Given that you clearly feel that music has a lot of potential for us as a species, that it has great value for our health and our spirits maybe, are you at all disturbed by the way that music manifests itself in today's world? The way that it's marketed? Are you disturbed at all, or concerned, about the way that music is packaged, in often a quite cynical way, in order to simply sell lots of units; and is associated with particular lifestyles, and illusory values, like the use of music in advertising, in movies and so on? I mean, it's certainly something that concerns me - that music is being re-presented in a very shallow context. And do you find it destructive or damaging that this is taking place? That's an essay question, I know...

DK Yes, I think my initial thoughts and feelings are yes, that I do experience periods of disturbance at things I see in the media, and how music is used to sell things. In fact, whenever I hear 'Day-oh!', I hear an ad for The Bon Marché. I'm trying to spend less time being disturbed by those things, and focussing my energy on creating opportunities for people where there's not the case. And that's the thing that continues my fascination with objects made from the environment, which you can manipulate in a musical or resonant way. I don't mean to say setting up a series of pan-lids that I'll be able to play a Mozart tune on, or something! But getting people to think that music is around them constantly, that potentially everything has musical possibilities. It would also be very hard for any organised group to take these ideas, and turn them into a commercial for the Bon Marché! So it's kind of built-in that they only serve that utilitarian purpose of furthering people's awareness of music as being ever-present.

EP So you're designing something that cannot be appropriated in that way, or mis-appropriated rather?

DK Yes, that's good. It also pretty much guarantees that I'll be poor for the rest of my life too! (Chuckles) Appropriation has a pay-off!

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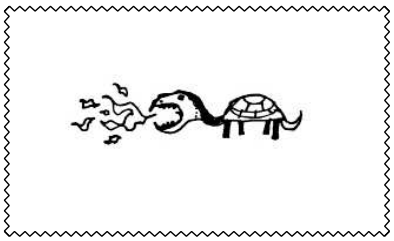
* Paintings with Strings, a collaboration with visual artist Danijel Zezelj is a series of 8 painted stringboards and is available for visual and auditory investigating before and after performances at Polestar Music Gallery ( ) 18th & Union, Seattle. The exhibition runs from 10.30.02 - 12.23.02.

THE IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD ORCHESTRA

Climax Golden Twins interview

Welcome to the Climax Golden Twins universe. Their exceptionally unusual record releases have intrigued this writer's ears since 2000, when the CD *Locations* reached the mag, but the mystery was deepened further by the astonishing CD and LP *Dream Cut Short in the Mysterious Clouds*. Then I was baffled by the high-weirdness rock and cut-up approach of the so-called Polka Dot record. Turns out this entire 'art project' functions on an endearingly small scale - the core of the band are two guys, Jeffery Taylor and Rob Millis, although producer Scott Colburn is reckoned as the third member. Both Taylor and Millis are very reasonable and prepared to discuss virtually all aspects of their approach to making music; certainly there is no attempt to create a Residents-like shroud of anonymity, despite their appearance in a local Seattle magazine wearing 78 rpm records over their faces ➜. Jeffery Taylor is a collector of rare 78 records, owner of several fine guitars including a National Steel, and applies his visual art skills to the package designs of CGT releases. Rob Millis is a traveller to exotic locales, manager of the local record shop Wall Of Sound, and also collects rare 78s. They both play guitars and consider that their main musical strength - Jeffery I think would rather rock out with loud avant-metal guitar noise than almost anything! - Playing live is quite another thing - I think they rely more on computer technology to manipulate and layer CDs and DAT tapes - but in the studio, many techniques are deployed to make their fascinating records. The layers of treated sound come from their deployment of rare ethnic and

other records from their 78 collections, and from environmental recordings from Russell Johnson or from Rob, collected on his travels. The studio ingenuity and invention comes largely from Colburn, whose inscrutable methods are examined in his interview. Indeed, the CGT aesthetic (if indeed there is one) may not have got as far as it has done without the input of Scott Colburn, who has somehow understood what they want to do and found ways to transform their dreams into reality.



Their 'vanity press' label Fire Breathing Turtle has been home to many CGT releases, but it also helped Jesse Paul Miller by releasing the Secret Records seven-inch. In turn, Anomalous Records boss Eric Lanzillotta has provided patronage of a sort through distribution and record pressings. The band's profile was recently raised a notch when they were commissioned to do a soundtrack for a small Hollywood movie.

Date - 21 April 2002
Place - Seattle, Jeffery Taylor's home
Present - Rob Millis (RM), Jeffery Taylor (JT), Ed Pinsent (EP)

SESSION 9

EP Tell me about this soundtrack LP, first of all. How on earth did that come about?

JT *Session 9*? It came about because Milan Records wanted to get in on the distribution of it, because it was a USA Films release, so they decided that it would be in their best interests to issue the CD along with the release of the film.

RM They love to be able to make a soundtrack CD, because the licensing issues are much cheaper, or they've already got control of the music, so they'll release the CD and they can make money. So they were ready to release this CD and they were probably hoping to have a bunch of other artists on the CD.

JT Yeah, it's kinda stunning that we were able to get *us*!

EP So it wasn't a commission then? It's not like someone phoned you up and said we must have a Sun City Girls - sorry, I mean a Climax Golden Twins soundtrack.

JT We *are* Sun City Girls. Let's get that straight right off the bat.

RM It was actually a friend of mine wrote the movie, and he suggested that we be in it from the beginning. It took a little convincing for the director, because it was his first film. They needed to convince the higher-ups at USA Films that these weirdos from Seattle were worth giving almost no money whatsoever to!

JT His friend the screenwriter had heard bits and pieces of our music and he figured it would work well with the film, Which it did, I think. It was a pretty nice complement. And I think it was a coup for us to be able to release the CD. We had literally done all the cues for the film, we had three hours' worth of these cues, and a guy calls up from Milan Records and says 'let's do a soundtrack CD. I need a master in two weeks!' So we literally put that record together in two weeks. It was nice to work like that, have a deadline. Usually, we're very slow and methodical getting our stuff together.

RM It's a little aggravating, because you do something to match it up exactly with the film, and then the director uses that [piece of music] someplace else. But we had a lot of cues, a lot of themes for the different characters and things like that. When we made the CD we were able to use all that stuff as we'd wanted it, flow it all together. When they're doing the final mix of the film, they worry that...'well, this piece of music is playing with this dialogue, and it seems like the drum track in the music is interfering with the dialogue, so we'd like to be able to pull the drum track out.'

JT It was a great experience, it was really fun, but it was also kind of a nightmare. It's amazing that anyone in Hollywood can get a fuckin' movie made! It's unbelievable, the rigmarole...it's like a multi-headed [monster]...

RM They agreed to make this film, they gave them the script and USA Films changed the ending, they cut out a character, they made the director do this...'gotta make more sense'. The first cuts of the film we saw were actually quite a lot better.

JT Much more tricky and strange, and you didn't know what the hell was going on.

☆☆☆☆☆

WE'RE PRETTY VISUALLY ORIENTED

EP Have you worked on films before, or made films of your own?

RM We've done a lot of live scores for films, performing live to early silent films.

JT Some of the earliest live CGT stuff we did was for old silent movies...we're gonna be playing here at the end of May, doing a soundtrack [for a movie] called *Grass*. It's a movie about smoking pot! Just kidding. It's an old silent film.

RM *Grass* is an interesting film from 1924, made by the same person who made *King Kong* coincidentally. [The filmmakers] went to the Middle East, basically present-day Arabia and Persia, Iran, Iraq, and there's a migration of 500,000 animals that happened. This was in the 1920s, it's gotta be long since over. During the year from where they're living in the winter, they go to where the animals can still feed in the summer, and it's a 48 day trek - they climb over a 10,000 foot mountain, go over mountains and the ice, across raging rivers, they're all barefoot, they've got all these animals with them, and - it's just nuts! But it's an amazing testament to the human spirit, I guess. But also, in the way that it's filmed, there's a little bit of that 1920s [colonial spirit]: 'we're so civilised! Look at these crazy people walking across the ice in their bare feet!' But if you were put out there on your own, you would die. And they're not dying!

JT We did the soundtrack for this movie, 3 or 4 years ago. We did a pre-recorded soundtrack and showed it a local theatre. It came off really well, so they asked us - the same guy who's curating the EMP [Experience Music Project] movie series - asked us to do it again. We're gonna do a short cartoon called *He Resolves Not To Smoke*, from 1914 or 1915. That'll be mostly improvised, it's about five minutes long.

RM We're updating the *Grass* score a little bit, but it's mostly based on 78s and tape recordings from roughly the same time period, and roughly the same area. Since we first did it, we've collected more of the same kind of recordings, and have a better grasp of it. We don't plan to release it, it's meant to be [heard] with the film. We have released some of it.

EP Having listened to as much as I have of your recorded output,

there seems to be a kind of cinematic quality, as well as all the other qualities.

JT People said that from the get-go, and maybe that's because it's generally instrumental. It's atmospheric music, and often-time there's no rock 4-4 beat, so people don't have anything to latch onto. So they create [imaginary movies]...

EP True, but there's a great coherence to the work as well. You feel that you get from the start to the end of the record and there's a narrative shape, some kind of dynamic...

JT I think that's probably just how we work...it's probably our own little stories.

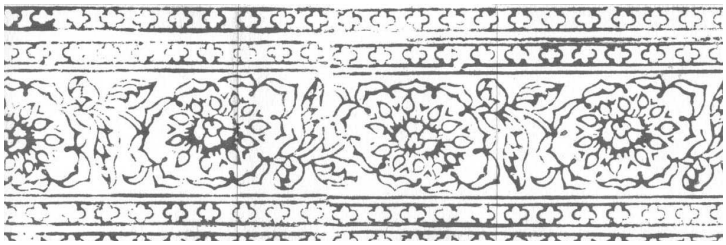
RM I think we're both pretty visually oriented, and that plays out in a strange way in the music. I maybe know a little bit more technically about music than Jeffery does in terms of harmonies and more traditional structures, but at the same time, that doesn't really matter for our music. A lot of the stuff we do, it's about the sound itself, the texture of the actual sound, that we begin the piece with, or that is the main thing in a piece of music. That shapes it more than any over-riding musical rules.

EP Is it a conscious decision to have these usually very blank sleeves, white covers for the records?

JT I guess I was making somewhat minimal art, around the time that I'd stopped making [visual] art and started making music-art. I was doing a lot of white-on-white, and I think that probably did carry over, although the first record was black, with silver foil. A couple of the releases - the three-inch CD and the field-recording CD, *Locations* as we sometimes call it - I think came off pretty beautifully. Although these days, it's a case of putting it in a damn plastic case, because that's what everyone else does! I guess it's easier for stores to deal with.

RM He also loves the texture of paper...it's the same thing with the texture of the music, finding the right kind of paper, and getting it to fold, and coming up with these great [solutions].

JT We have them printed and scored, but we generally do fold all of them up and stuff the CDs in. That can be a little labour-intensive. There's a CD we did for [Canadian label] Scratch Records, which was our first full-length CD. That was a nutty design which folded up in a somewhat intricate way. That was taxing! I guess Mark Spivey - one of the guys from Zoviet:France - he did a record as Propeller for Scratch, and used the exact same die, because he liked the packaging so much. That was nice to have someone use our design, and we got credit for it. But the packaging is always fun. That's definitely a part of it. That's were I get to a little bit of visual stuff, since I don't really do that too much any more, except drawing some little cartoons, to amuse myself and my friends...some of them!



THE CGT CATALOGUE IN SEQUENCE

EP Could you talk me through the releases? Each one seems to be its own separate statement, almost.

RM (Loudly) All right, number one! The double seven-inch! The first thing we released is a double seven-inch in late 1994. It's funny, we didn't have quite enough material for an LP or a CD or a ten-inch. But we had a little too much material for a seven-inch. We'd been playing together since 1991 or 1992, and always recording little things, and we just ended up having enough [material] after two years!

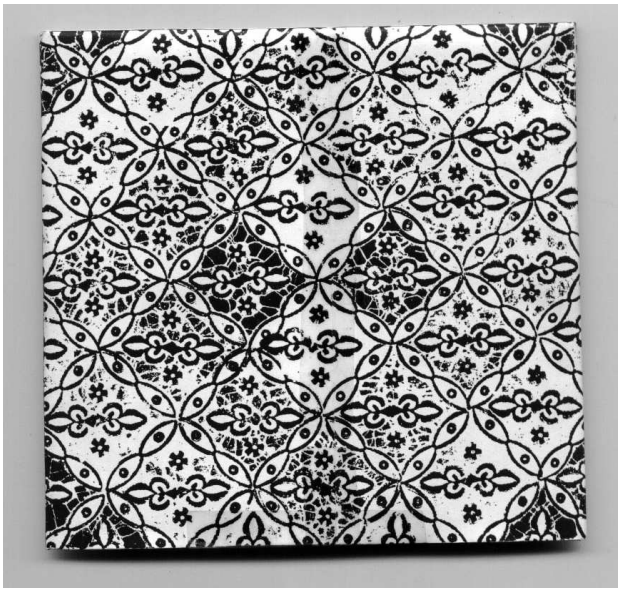
JT There are field recordings, but it's strange rock-type stuff...(struggling)...it's Po-Mo!

RM It is? I thought it was Lo-Mo! Lo-Fi Po-Mo! Low Modern...yeah, there was some interesting little guitar [work], there's cellos on it, a lotta weird found sounds.

JT We used field recordings from a buddy of ours named Russell Johnson, who's a great photographer and a great guy. He's an interesting character. He and his wife travel pretty extensively - India, Nepal and Tibet. He gave us some recordings to use. I think there's an old man singing on one of the songs, that's a recording of Russell's from Tibet.

RM Some of the pieces on that are also just improvised with friends of ours. We tend to play with a lot of people...

JT John Vallier is a guy we played drums with. He's a completely amazing drummer.



He's living in LA now. He played a little bit of drums on that first record. He was on the first full-length Scratch Record. After the double seven-inch, the next thing was our first CD, which was the three-inch CD. Which came out some time in 1995.

RM That one was somewhat similar, but a lot more abstract, less of the guitars and bass, and more field recordings.

JT Both of those releases were I think fairly well received. The three-inch is still one of my favourite things that we've done.

EP Who released that CD?

RM Fire Breathing Turtle. It's our vanity press.

JT By that time, at the end of the 3-inch record, some time in 1995, we met Scott [Colburn] and started doing things with him. He basically engineered that first record, the first full-length CD for Scratch Records which came out late 1996 some time.

RM That was a fun one in that it's really all over the map! We did all sorts of strange recording techniques. It was done in Scott's basement for the most part, though there's a lot of other little bits and pieces that weren't from [that session], that we had done earlier or just recorded.

JT Yeah, that's a strange one...I think it's still out there, still available. Revolver carries Scratch Records. That record did kind of well. Matmos chose it, they listed in the *Bay Area Guardian*, which is a local paper, as one of their picks for the year, which was amazing. I think I found that out years later.

RM It's chock-full too - it's just chock full [of ideas]!

EP Was it the first time you were in a proper recording studio?

RM Well, it wasn't particularly proper. That was when we were recording everything right next to the washer and dryer! Scott's basement - that was Scott's first studio. It was in the house where he lived with Jesse Paul Miller. We'd met Jesse a couple of years or so before that. It ended up that he and Scott lived together, and we recorded and played in that basement there a lot. It was a fun time, it was really good.

JT So then after that, a bunch of cassette things had happened in there...

EP This is the Victrola Favorites?

RM No...this is CGT stuff. Union Pole released a cassette, and a defunct label called EF. The EF cassette - I quite like that one. The Union Pole cassette was reviewed by Bananafish magazine, and it's great because they talk about how 'it sounds like they're playing in another room, down the hall, underwater...' and it's true, no matter how far you turn it up! It's so lo-fi!

JT So let's see, after the Scratch CD, what happened?

RM What happened? We exploded...our heads exploded.

JT We got hugely famous and married top superstar models. And your dick fell off. Remember that?

RM There was another seven-inch that we released in there, on Road Cone Records. Which is another release of ours I quite like.

JT That's an oddball.

RM That's a beautiful one for the design. That one we didn't do with Scott, we did that on our own. I was actually travelling a whole bunch at that point, I was in India and Nepal, and I came back just after we released the Scratch record, and I had a bunch of recordings that I'd made while I was travelling. Jeff had some from travels that he'd gone on, and some other friends of ours had some, and we really wanted to release them in some way. So we did the next release, which was basically just sequenced field recordings from all around.

EP And that's the one you call Locations*?*

RM Yeah. (Jeff reappears with the previous seven-inch single). Check out the vinyl on it too. It all works nicely together. *Locations*...that one just caused people to scratch their heads, because [previously] we'd done these things that had some rock leanings, and instruments and recognisable stuff on them, and then...

JT That came out in 1997, I guess...and that's one of *my* favourite things that we've done.

EP It's one of mine too. I do like that it's perplexing, and cryptic.

RM I know. We didn't put any information on it, about where the stuff was [from] or anything.

JT I don't think we ever really intended it to be like that, it was just 'oh, here's all these beautiful little pieces and parts, and some are long and some are short, and here's how we put it together', and it's really quite nice - it is like a travel piece, it's like a trip. You sit down and pop it on and listen to it and you go with it - to somewhere.

EP What most people tend to do is contextualise everything. If an average person put out a record like that, they'd just have to tell you the details of where they recorded it. Sometimes, quite meticulously.

RM Which *is* interesting.

JT Yes, I like that. Like Chris Watson's CDs. And that's all specced out - it tells you what everything is, the microphone that he used. The field recordings CD came out in 1997. [Next] was the series of ten-inchers. *Climax Golden Twins live*, volumes one through four...

RM You ever heard any of those? It was actually something we'd done earlier as a cassette tape release. Something that shows [Scott's studio expertise], it was very much Scott. We had a lot of live recordings, some of which were really good, some of which were terrible, some of which were fun. But Scott said 'we gotta organise these in some way. Let's release some cassettes on Fire Breathing Turtle.'

JT Here we are in the late 1990s, still labouring over cassette tape releases!

RM So we sat down and edited together four volumes of live recordings. Some of which are edited together lots of different recordings, different live shows. We made and released these cassettes, and we seemed to sell a fair amount of them.

JT Volume three was a cut-up of several different times and places and jams and what-not. Eric Lanzillotta really liked them and asked us if we wanted to do a ten-inch series of all four of them. I think he did 200 [copies] of each and they sold out immediately. I think some sold out pre-orders, which was great for us.

EP How did they sell so quickly?

RM-JT (together) Everyone knew about 'em, they were limited, it was on Anomalous which was getting a name for itself.

RM He'd started out in town here with a performance space, he was really pushing that. Seattle being the sometimes lame city it is, these performances were drastically under-attended, so he switched over to being a distributor and really concentrating on his label more. Anyway, the labels - since they were ten-inchers, the labels were all inspired by, or stolen directly from old 78 labels.

JT We'd blank out the names and put on ourselves. It was done on a computer.

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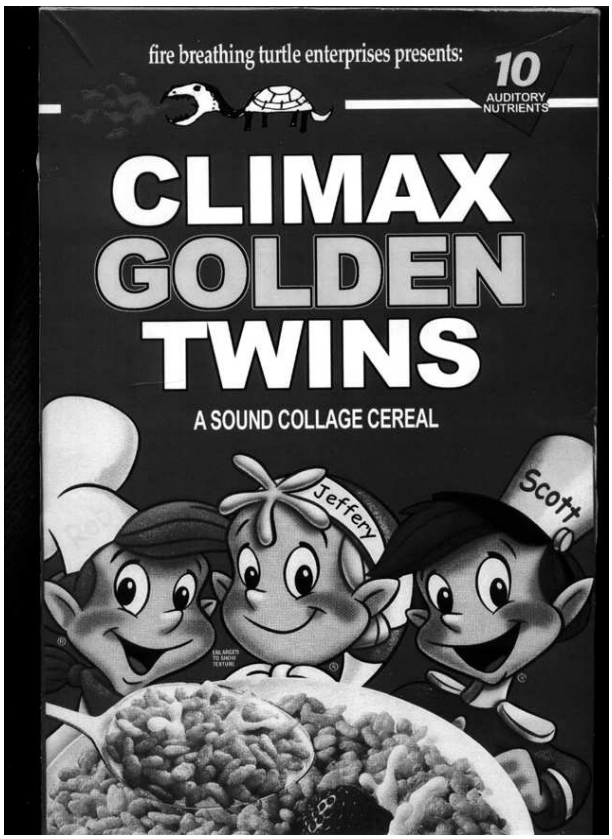
DREAM CUT SHORT

JT The Meme thing took a long time to come out. This guy asked us at least a year prior, we said we'd love to put out a CD on your label, I guess we worked for another year getting that together.



RM Here's an interesting aside [about the Meme label]...all his stuff is white! I don't know if you've seen most of his releases but they all look exactly the same. That wasn't a conscious element on our part, but it did fit in.

EP So, did Meme do the LP version as well?

JT No, that was Anomalous. The reason why Eric did the LP version is because we'd finally finished it and it took us quite some time, and we sent the master to a CD master in Japan, and nothing happened for a very long time. Almost another year went by. Hey, what the hell? We finally started sending him e-mails saying 'look, is this gonna come out or not?' And then we finally got to the point where Eric said 'Let me do it on LP'. Eric really liked the recordings. We said 'that would be great'. So we sent him an e-mail in Japan and said 'send us the master back, because we're gonna do it on LP'. He replied 'No, no, I'm gonna do it!' And he did it right then and there! It was possibly one of the last Meme CDs. I think he's done a few since then, but I don't know if it's still in existence. So it came out in Japan on CD, and Eric did the limited LP version, I think he did 500 [copies].

RM The cover of [the LP], Jeffery did the design.

JT That was fun. I had to be coerced into it.

EP Is it expensive to do laminated letters like that?

JT Eric kept calling it a 'UV coating'. What I call it is 'clear ink'. I guess maybe what they call that is UV on matt paper. So you get a gloss [on matt]...I like that effect. The Road Cone seven-inch is the same way. It's clear [ink] on black, which gives you two black tones. You gotta hold it to the light and you can see the information - otherwise it's invisible. That's kinda fun.

EP This is Dream Cut Short in the Mysterious Clouds *we're talking about, isn't it?*

JT Yes, and the reason the record is called that is that Rob had found a 78, a home-recorded acetate, of a Chinese opera classical piece. And it was extremely crunchy. At one point we were going to release that very record as a seven-inch, as it was, which we never did - we should probably thank God we didn't do it!

RM (laughs) Another money-losing venture!

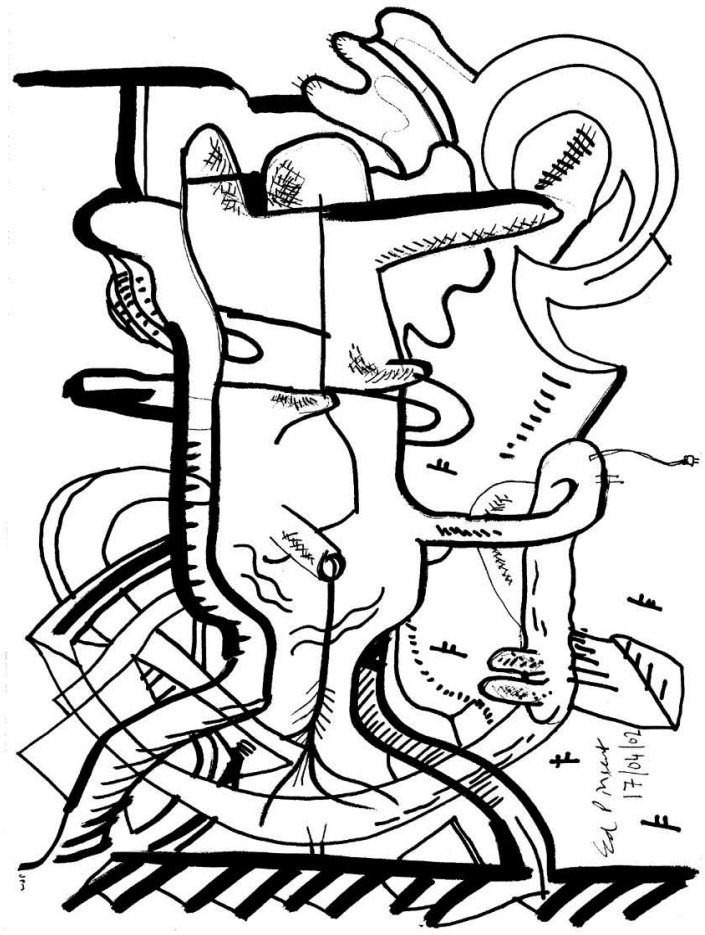
JT Money-losing ventures is what the Climax Golden Twins are all

about. So Rob had the label translated at a Chinese restaurant here in town. The person said something like 'Knife through Fog and trees'...

RM No, that's exactly what she said, she said Dream Cut Short. I have the piece of paper. 'Dream cut short, or stopped, in the mysterious clouds.' I said, what a beautiful phrase. Maybe she was mistranslating it, because she was reading hand-written characters, she said 'I can't quite get this'. But it seemed to fit the record.

EP Are you interested in Surrealism? That's a really pure Surrealist statement, the whole thing...but that applies to the music as well. It creates this tremendous delirious effect which I think is really powerful.

JT Thank you, that's interesting. That's a strange record...I kind of want to go back and listen to some of these records now! *Dream* for us is possibly our most pure electro-acoustic or concrète-type record.



RM When we started working on it we had been listening to at that time some of the more electronic music that was coming out, like Ryoji Ikeda, who had just started to become popular.

JT So we were just hopping on the fuckin' computer bandwagon!

EP So Dream *is a combination of computer music, old records, live band recordings...*

JT A lot of the source material was acoustic or organic instruments - guitar, piano, voice, things like that, and then heavily treated. It became electronic-sounding. Some of the drones, or samples in there are literally a second long. We just like extended it, held it, prodded it, kicked it, until it did something that we liked.

EP Was Scott Colburn quite a big help with realising that record?

JT Actually, from the point of the Scratch CD [onward], Scott has engineered and worked on almost everything we've done, 90% of everything we've released. We all have a good camaraderie, we communicate well. Usually it's just me sitting on the couch, drunk, yelling at these guys, 'Naah! More fuckin' reverb!' But they *understand* my inner [being], what I'm trying to say!

RM By which he means - we just ignore him! 'Yes, Jeff, we put the reverb on that! Can't you hear it?' Yeah, we just have a good time working together. That's the most important thing. It's not even work.

JT There's good discourse. It's mostly a good time. It's what we wanna do. And that's what's been nice about our 'career' - as an unmusical ensemble, in that we've really been able to do what we've wanted to do. I suppose that's what the ultimate goal is for any artist, really.

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THE POLKA DOT RECORD

RM The Polka Dot came out the same time as the soundtrack, last year, June 2001.

JT The Polka Dot record was coming back to how we started, playing guitars and basses and piano, which I really love doing, If it were up to me that's all I would do, every day, is go plug it in and play it really loud.

EP Who's your drummer on that record?

JT Scott, and Rob, and John Vallier. The material on that record spans a number of years.

RM Actually it spans most of our career. One of the first ways we used to work together when we first started hanging out - I had a house, Jeff would come over after work, I had a basement studio set up and I had a drum set, and we would improvise and mess around. We recorded a lot of little numbers that never even made it onto anything.

JT Some of those [jams] reared their ugly heads on that release. And there was a lot of new stuff from that time. Jeph Jerman also played drums on it, on two or three tracks. Jeph's another amazing individual musician.

RM Has Eric told you all about Jeph Jerman?

EP Yes - I've heard nothing but stories about Jeph Jerman since I got here. A legendary guy, it seems. But I've heard the cactus record, and the one with the stones.

JT Yeah, he's fairly prolific. He's got a lot of cassette releases.

RM Doesn't it come across, in those two recordings, is seeing him manipulate those tiny, tiny objects, tiny shells and rocks right in front of you - and you have to *strain* to hear it. You become conscious of your whole body.

JT Yes, it's amazing. That's a really transformative musical experience.

RM We've been lucky to play with him on a couple of occasions. We'd been playing like that with him, using these small, tiny percussive objects; the next day he'll come by the studio and we'll bang out some bad proto-punk rock crap! It's fun, it's great. Post punk-rock crap crap!

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THE TEXTURE OF THE SOUND

RM For us, it's always - Jeff may disagree with me -

JT I disagree!

RM OK, you're right, I'm wrong! It's always about the sound for me. I think, even as a kid when I started messing around with recording myself, playing guitar or drums or whatever it is that I would bang on, I just loved the texture of the sound itself. I was never so interested in music as something that you compose and have this language in. It's always the texture of the sound that I really like. And I think that translates a lot into Climax Golden Twins. The texture of these recordings, whether it's people's voices speaking in languages you don't understand, or market places, interesting locations that things happen in, or the quality of the microphone - it just really appeals to me on a subliminal auditory level.

JT I *totally* -

RM - disagree?

JT - agree with you! It's true, I've been thinking about that a lot lately. I think that's especially true for me, although maybe I've never really thought about it or put it into words. Like for instance, Rob and I both really love Old Timey, Blues and hillbilly music. I think that I've found that I often don't pay attention to lyrics, or the lyric is another

instrument for me. And that's why I like learning some of these old songs. Rob knows all the words. He tells me, 'oh yeah, this song's about that.' I say ' Really? I don't remember that!'

RM I can't help but understand the words if it's sung in English.

JT And this is why I like international music, world music, ethnic music or whatever you want to call it. That's totally another instrument - the voice - because you don't know what they're singing about in their language. You don't know whether they're singing some cheesy love song or not. But you become transfixed by it. The quality of the sound.

RM Like the first track on that Revenant [compilation], we were talking about - *American Primitive*. That is such a great song! The surface noise is insane! But it just adds to it, because he's coming through these layers of history, clouds of...

JT Y'know, I'm a surface man! I love that song!

RM I love the song and I love the [noise], but it all works together for me. It's excellent. That's one of the things about 78s, they've got so much history. So many people have handled them, and that comes through on their surfaces.

JT But coming back to the field recordings thing, that is pretty strictly about textures as Rob has been saying...all night long!

RM For some reason that's my word today!

JT I mean, we went over that thing with a fine-tooth comb to put it together. I guess that's how we work - pretty labour-intensive sometimes. We really go over and over...

EP So, there's an intuitive feel for what makes a recording interesting, and that's why you select it. Is the assembling and editing quite meticulous, you say you took a lot of time over it?

JT Absolutely. To figure out how this piece, which is completely unrelated to this piece, is gonna flow into it, or work next to it.

RM I think on a strange level we came up with - it's almost like it was composed, in that there's certain sounds that seem to echo themselves, even though they're completely different recordings from different places. There is a structure to it. Maybe something suggested the next thing that happens or the next way we layered it. Somehow, I don't know - it is intuitive. We had a good time putting it together.

EP I think that's what I meant by 'cinematic' earlier. All I meant was the shape and the way it's put together, almost like montage.

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OUR NEXT RECORD IS ALL CIRCUS MUSIC

JT Our Polka Dot record - that was another head-scratcher for some people. If anybody was paying any attention, they would understand those leanings of ours. I think there's a few people that would pay attention.

EP I think that's an interesting point - you say that about people paying attention. But what I like about the work I've heard so far is that it doesn't tell you everything in ten seconds. You've got to work, and you've got to listen to it, and you've got to digest it, and start to understand it. In today's 'instant culture', that means an awful lot.

JT Yes, that would be part of the collaboration of Rob and myself. Having gotten together and figured it out that we like to do these things...

RM What things? People don't need to know about *those* things!

JT It's ongoing, it's evolving...we're sitting here talking about all this, it's making me think we should listen back to all this. Now it's the acoustic guitar thing, which we've been doing with Dave Knott and Rick Bishop, and variations on that quartet. We just have a blast. It's the American folk music renaissance again! And that's been happening commercially too. The whole *Oh Brother Where Art Thou* soundtrack thing.

RM But a lot of what we do with Dave and Rick is improvisational. It's funny, when you talk about that ten-second thing, I often thought about that, if someone popped on the Meme record and listened to the first ten seconds - it's a little punk rock cut-up explosion the way it begins - and if they put that on they'd say 'Ugh! I don't want to listen to this!' But the rest of it doesn't [sound anything like that].

EP Exactly - you haven't heard the whole record, unless you play it all the way through.

JT I think that's also because we have Attention Deficit Disorder, living in America! The instant culture that we live in, as you say. 'Let's do this! And then let's do this! Let's put 'em together!' Our next record is all circus music!

EP When you have these old records that you use, I feel you have some considerable sympathy with them as objects. You're not just using them as one more weird sound source. I say this because it's my campaign against DJs generally. There's been this thing for the last ten years where DJs just get hold of any 'weird' record they like the look of and use maybe five seconds of it in some big mix of horrible rubbish or other. What disturbs me about it is the decontextualising of it all. They don't really care where they got it or what it is, or the fact that another musician made it. They're not out to present the work of that musician so that other people will understand it...

JT That's interesting - certainly we've used tiny little snippets of things like that. Certainly we have stolen from musicians, unknown and known.

RM But we're all about RE-contextualising....[I was looking at my record collection] last night, the other day and [I thought] 'Where did I get this?' and I realised that a lot of it I had gotten for that very reason, that it might have an amusing little couple of seconds on it that I can steal. But I never did. I never wanted to, because it's exactly like Jeff said, the stuff that we have stolen from or borrowed from or re-contextualised ....appropriated, there's a good word! - is generally music that we love. For some reason, or some tiny fragment of a record that we've listened to a lot. There's a moment on the Meme record - I think it's the soundtrack to a Chinese movie from the 40s, and you can hear this Chinese guy going 'Herr-hrrmm!', and the record has a little crackling on it. But I love the whole record. That one little moment reminds me of the record and makes it part of our overall musical experience. Re-contextualising ourselves. So, next year Jeff's gonna be a woman! But we love women, so that's OK!

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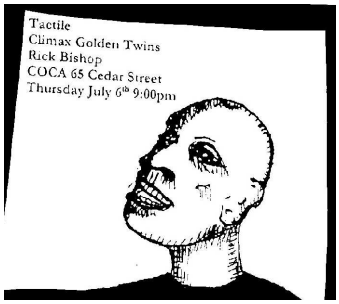
DOING IT LIVE

EP So tell me about your live work. I saw a video last night of you playing live in some place in Seattle. Jesse had that - it's a bootleg. It was live electronics, and had movies played in the background.

RM (Trying to recall the show) Did I break a record over Jeff's head?

JT I think I know the show. It's probably the OK hotel. That was about four years ago. I believe that particular show is probably

completely improvised. Sometimes we'll get together beforehand and say 'Let's use this piece and this piece as segues, between us doing whatever we want.'



RM A lot of what makes those shows look so good is Jesse and Linda. They are improvising with their films and slides, and it really makes for a nice mixture of things.

JT People will always come up afterwards and ask 'what was in that certain section?' and we have no idea. Generally we're not looking at what they're doing. They're improvising right along with us.

RM They have a similar sort of aesthetic, except visually. They're taking films that they like or amuse them that they found, using them and mixing them, slides that they made.

JT Not just straight photographs, but often doctored slides.

RM I've got one slide that Jesse made somewhere. Before one show a couple of years ago, he came over here and we made a couple of slides. There's one that's a dirt slide. I love it. It's this tape with dirt in it, in a slide mount! I don't think it looked like much, but when it was projected [you saw] flowers and leaves.

JT A lot of times our performances are fairly jocular. There's a lot of humour involved. People have written a letter to us or contacted our website without ever having seen us live since we've never played anywhere outside of here, and New York a couple of times. They say 'I really appreciate your sense of humour.' And that's the greatest thing to me, that people listen to our records, and pick up that we're having fun. Some of these things might be like a little [private] joke to us, we don't think anybody would ever get it. But they're getting it. Or they're finding their own joke.

RM Or at least [getting] the vibe of it.

EP Did you say you've done something with Lee Renaldo?

JT Recently, yeah. That was a great show. That show was devoid of any humour whatsoever!

RM That was at the EMP. Lee's wife is a filmmaker. I think they've been doing it for about ten years or so - she'll project the films and he'll improvise music, and more recently they've been involving other people like Rafael Toral, I know they did some shows in Europe with him. So when he came to Seattle to do it, he asked us, which was great. We've played with Sonic Youth. They'd asked us to open up for them in 1998, which was a really fun show, the biggest show we'd ever played. Trundling all our crappy electronics out on stage!

JT It's bits of broken down, old, decaying equipment.

RM I kind of like this. It's like this when we play rock music too. Everything is just on the edge of falling apart. Unfortunately, Jeff's stuff usually *does* fall apart! But it doesn't seem to matter.

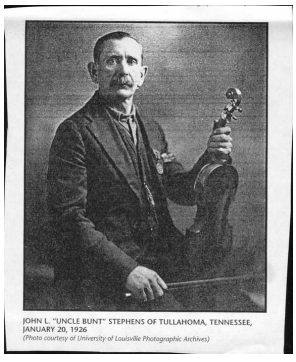
JT We literally showed up to the theatre and I had my suitcase, and that's all I had! And Rob had his box of stuff, that's all he had. The other opening bands had a truckful of stuff, Sonic Youth has a semi-truckful of stuff. That's great, I'd love to be able to do that, but here we are with our suitcases! Showing up and saying, OK where do we plug in?

RM So we improvised with Lee at the EMP. I thought it sounded great. Lee felt that he wasn't as loud as he'd like to be, his feedback, some of the things he does with his guitar. I thought it sounded great.

EP Yes, it's good about Sonic Youth. Wherever they go, they suss out who's the good band to play with...

RM They failed in Seattle! They got us!

JT I guess Thurston is a big record collector, and he had heard of us right from the double seven-inch. He read the review of that and I know Eric's told us he's ordered records from Anomalous, so he's got most of our stuff. So that was a nice compliment. Good for those guys, for seeking out the unknown bands that they like.


JOHN L. "UNCLE BUNT" STEPHENS OF TULLAHOMA, TENNESSEE, JANUARY 20, 1926
(Photo courtesy of University of Louisville Photographic Archives)

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VICTROLA FAVORITES

RM We should mention the Fire Breathing Turtle *Victrola Favorites* cassettes. You were talking about incorporating samples that you love and enjoy, and about the same time that we really did start using them in our music, we started doing these cassettes. The first one was a little weird - we did a lot more cutting up of records, but it was still all recorded from the Victrola.

JT But thereafter, the idea of the whole series was that it was directly recorded from the Victrola. You're listening to the acoustic reproduction of this record. Obviously, we have recorded it electronically!

RM But still, the idea is as close to the original listening experience. Since that first volume - we did ten volumes - they've all been about the music and the reproduction. We haven't really messed with it.

JT The first volume was a mix...we were fucking around with some of the records a little bit. But since then they've all been thematic. There's a Japanese one, a Chinese one, a Burmese one...the Burmese one, all those records were supplied by Alan Bishop from Sun City Girls. Ideally, we wanted to have more curated tapes like that, but that ended up being the only one. There's a Turkish one, a Hawaiian one, a Country-Hillbilly one. There's pop-jazz novelties. Chinese opera. This is happening in the very late 1990s, we started it in 1998. We sold quite a few of those [tapes], which was to me very surprising. Some guy e-mailed Rob and said 'I heard one of these [tapes] in a club in Japan! Where can I get some?' People would come out of the woodwork, asking where to get volumes. It's great that people were really interested. So we're doing as a CD a version of the *Victrola Favorites*. There won't be any overflow from the ten cassette volumes, except maybe one or two things. The first volume will be a big mix of different genres and styles and ethnicities.

RM We recorded all of this at Scott's studio, with a couple of different Victrolas.

JT We were hoping it was gonna come out quickly, like some time this year, but it could take more time. We had six or seven different machines down there, and threw up a mike on each one, found the sweet spot for it as best we could. Scott used a good microphone. Just sat down and played a bunch of records.

EP Where do you get your records from? Can you get everything in Seattle? Do you have to send away for them?

JT We've done a few auctions. Not too much, because ultimately you end up paying a lot of money for them. Some of those things are obviously worth paying the money for, because where the hell else are you gonna find it? But a lot of it we just find locally, within a couple of hours of Seattle, and a few things we've found on different trips that we've taken in the States. My mother lives in Virginia. We had a lot of luck in Texas, and New York. Man, once you get going on it, it's like 'where are they? I must have more!'

MAGIC FOR EDIBLE BULBS
This native dressed in white birds' down to resemble a bulb with a head-dress of blossom is a totem magician forcing all the food bulbs to flower and fructify for his tribe.

RM Perseverance pays off. You keep going to the same junk store over and over and you'll get there the one day when some dealer has 20 of these things, and you find some great stuff. You just gotta persevere. And it's an interesting time. It'll probably be like this in the future for LPs or CDs. There's a point where - certainly collectors of 78s in 1920s, 1930s, 40s and 50s - they amassed good collections, then they died, and their collections passed on to their children, and they suddenly have become dispersed. Maybe they ended up living in Seattle and then they died, and their children don't know what to do with it, so...it's interesting, it's like all the records come together, and then they go out again.

JT Part of the fascination is like - the history of this piece of shellac! Where did this come from? Who

played this?

RM How did a weird Chinese opera 78 end up in a junk store in Bellevue?

JT We're on the Pacific rim, so we have had extreme luck in finding good Asian music - Chinese, Japanese - not so much Korean, which is a drag, because Korean traditional music is awesome! Japanese and Chinese stuff is killer as well, but Korean stuff...

RM In fact, an early influence on both Jeff and I - a friend of ours that we were working with went to Korea to do an installation there. I said 'bring me back a CD of whatever you can find, of traditional Korean music'. And what he came back with was actually remastered stuff from the 20s or early 30s. And it just blew me away! I hadn't really been listening to 78s at that point, certainly not old ethnic stuff, and the sound quality of it, the remoteness of it, was just...Jeff and I have been trading the CD back and forth for years!

JT There's record reissues now - the whole Secret Museum of Mankind series is really awesome. I'd actually like to meet that guy, beat him up and take all of his records! I think we started that stuff concurrently [with him]...our interest grew. Obviously there's been a lot of scholars [before] who have been doing things for decades before we ever got interested in it. There's all the more to read about, to figure out, to connect, to find out about.

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YOU DON'T HAVE AN IMAGE

JT Scott had been working with Sun City Girls for quite some time, and even before we met Scott we had gotten Sun City Girls comparisons - God knows why! - maybe because of the vague ethnic qualities of our music.

RM But it's not in anything we play. Like Rick [Bishop] can whip off these oooh-type solos.

JT It's funny you said Sun City Girls earlier, and that's why I said 'well we are Sun City Girls'. That's what we go around telling everyone. We did that on an interview with WFMU Radio.

EP Well one interesting connection [between you] is the anonymity [of both bands]. Sun City Girls don't like to have an 'image', and neither do you.

RM Is it that we don't like to have an image, or we never had that much of a chance to have an image? No-one's really clamoured to have our photos on things.

JT Yeah, I mean who wants to look at us? I mean, admittedly, I am beautiful! You know, I'm just stunning! People see me and they just stop dead in their tracks...

RM Jeff, you're looking at me - you're not looking in a mirror!

EP I just read a small ad in the paper today, they wanted a singer for their band...they said 'this is a professional band, so looks are important'.

JT That's often used, 'looks are important'...'must have looks'...what the fuck does *that* mean?

RM It used to be 'must have chops', but not any more!

JT No, we don't have those either.

RM You see, that's the other thing about Climax Golden Twins and people that we've been playing with...Lord knows we could use a regular drummer, but we've never had to advertise to get that. We've never wanted to. It's all about our friendship, essentially, the music we're exploring and how that enters into the music we create, and so on. It's not about getting a band together that gonna make it. Wouldn't it be great to make it big, Jeff? Maybe we should work on it. (Suddenly inspired) Why haven't we been working on that?! Get out there, man! Send some promos out! Get David Geffen on the phone! I wanna be rich...I wanna go out with Britney Spears.

JT I don't wanna go out with Britney Spears, but I wouldn't mind being rich. We're anonymous.

RM I don't even know who Jeff is!

JT As to including our names...the first release we put our names on, and we put some other folks' names on it who were involved and helped us put it together. And then after that we just decided, ehh - it doesn't matter. We've also generally never named any songs, we've never given songs titles. We have our own titles for secret things...

EP Your LPs don't have titles much either.

RM The most recent one had song titles, it's just when the mood takes us or when it seems appropriate.

JT I think it's a quasi-conscious decision to do that. And all of that has probably helped lend the aura of mysteriousness.

EP It should also help people focus on the music more.

JT That was probably the idea, I suppose.

RM Especially with stuff like the field recordings CD and the three-incher, to me it's more about interesting sounds, and out of some context of it...just listen to these sounds and immerse yourself in the aural experience.

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THE SECRET RECORD

RM ...talking through the releases, I just realised there was one thing we were working on in that big gap of time, after *Locations* came out, was Jesse's single. The only other thing we released on Fire Breathing Turtle besides our own stuff.

EP Yes, you should tell me that story.

RM He came downstairs one day and he'd made this record. We just thought it was great and the sound quality...it was probably about the same time as we were getting into 78s. That totally distorted fucked-up sound quality. We immediately realised the marketing value of it! I personally had some money, and I loaned him some money to buy some materials, he made a bunch of 'em and then we eventually put out a record of it. He kept going with them...look up there, there's some of the early ones [on Jeff's wall]. We did 500 or 300 seven inches, little collages of sounds from the Secret Records, and the first 25 actually had a Secret Record in them. We sold those out immediately. We had a great party.

JT And Jesse got a show at the Seattle Art Museum, of the Secret Records.

EP What interests me is how he arrived at a different place [to yourselves], though through quite similar methods. The first time I heard that [Secret Records] single it literally took my breath away. It seemed apocalyptic in a way. Something rather lonely about it. It's like this was all that was left of the 20th century.

RM That's very good. Did you understand what the process was?

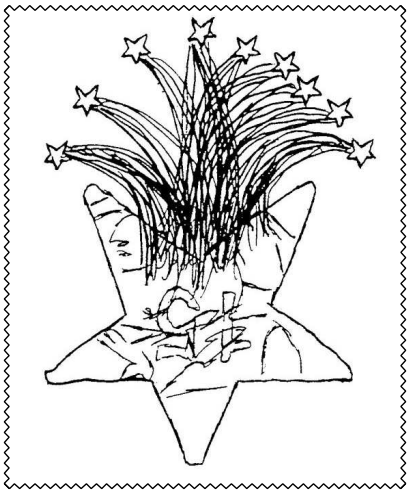
JT He totally did! Like I said when I first e-mailed Ed, Jesse said that your review was right on, it hit the nail on the head, you understood perfectly. And that's what I wondered about that release - did people really get it? There were minimal notes included, that basically explained the process, but they were a little obtuse maybe, or it may have been difficult to wrap your head around exactly what it was that he was doing, what it was that you were hearing. So I wonder how many people really did understand the whole concept of the record. But I think it was a fantastic thing to do, and I'm glad there's a document of it.

RM Scott's listening sensibilities and musical sensibilities are definitely different than Jeffery and I's...Jeffery's and mine are different from each other, Jess is a whole other thing. But we all just ended up being friends and circulating round that house that Jesse and Scott lived in. Now we all see a lot of each other in different times. It's a really interesting community, because it's not necessarily based on 'this is an avant-garde music community, so we have to go out and see this person's band because they're experimental and we have to support them, and if we go see them and they'll come and see us.' It's more like we're friends - and our ideas have been feeding off of one another. Who knows how much further Jesse would have gotten with it after he made that one? They're pretty brilliant, he probably would have. But we happened to be right there and we had some band money. We saw stars in our eyes immediately! 'Yes! You've gotta make some for us! We'll put it out for you!' And it just led to good things for him, and for us. It's all fed off one another, it's been fun, and I've given him some sounds that he's used in installations, where I helped him work on sounds and he's done the projections for us. It's been great, it's really eye-opening for all of us. □

Note by EP: The Experience Music Project is a large themed modern museum warehouse in the middle of Seattle. Funded by Paul Allen, a dot.com millionaire who happens to like Jimi Hendrix, it purports to be a museum dedicated to the history of rock music. I visited it one rainy day and it's an utter monstrosity for the most part - filled with relics and ephemera that swallow unquestioningly the dumb myths of rock music and rock superstars. However, it also has a performance venue - where the Twins have performed.

Climax Golden Twins Discography

With comments by the Twins.



Lovely
ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM 15 CD (2002)
Originally created as an art gallery installation, then released in such an extremely limited quantity by Gravelvoice Records (like maybe three or so-see below under *Night Night*) that Anomalous Records was forced to leap in to save *Lovely* from obscurity.

Session 9 OST
MILAN INTERNATIONAL CD (2001)
Culled from the material created for the film of the same name. Arranged and sequenced by us, including some material that never made it into the film (stupid director!). Also includes Ussachevsky's 'Piece For Tape Recorder' - fine company to be with. Consists mostly of tape and electronic manipulations, studio trickery and skullduggery, and a little bit of piano.

Climax Golden Twins [The Polka Dot Record]
FIRE BREATHING TURTLE FBT 007 CD (2000)
Strange and skewed songs and instrumentals: guitars, found sounds, drums, percussions, distortions, manipulations. Guests include Jeph Jerman, John Vallier, and Scott Colburn among other dreadful individuals. Does your mother know I'm here? Guitars are amplified and the drums are served at room temperature. Also released on vinyl by SINCE1972 (Seattle record label).

Dream Cut Short in the Mysterious Clouds
ANOMALOUS RECORDS FBT 006 LP (2000)
Dream Cut Short in the Mysterious Clouds
MEME RECORDS MEME018CD CD (2000)
Recorded 1999, released in 2000. Manipulated tones, instruments, static, disembodied voices, lovely drones, site recordings, scratchy records, five second punk rock wipeouts - all edited, compressed, collaged and distressed. The LP is limited to 500 copies and is pressed on audiophile white vinyl.

Live Volumes I-IV
ANOMALOUS RECORDS FBT005A,B,C,D TEN INCH LPS (FOUR RECORD SET) (1999-2000)
Originally a series of cassettes on Fire Breathing Turtle, these recordings of live material from clubs, living rooms, parties, basements and street corners, feature a strange cast of characters. Rescued from cassette obscurity by Anomalous Records, pressed onto four ten inch vinyl LPs with labels inspired by old 78rpm labels. Released between Fall 1999 and Spring 2000. Now out of print.

Night Night
GRAVELVOICE CD-R
Quiet and cyclical music, a lovely drone, packaged not with Buckwheat Zydeco (which probably wouldn't help you sleep) but with a buckwheat hull pillow. First volume in what is/was(?) a planned series of releases to help the populace sleep peacefully. Very out of print.

Climax Golden Twins [Locations]
FIRE BREATHING TURTLE FBT 004 CD (1998)
Released in 1998 and composed of many hours of site and ambiance recordings made around the globe: markets, temples, hotels, next door neighbours, Gamelan orchestras, Indian mumbles, calls to prayer, distilled into an intricately edited work, and packaged in a folded foil stamped sleeve.

Climax Golden Twins
ROADCONE RECORDS ROCO16 SEVEN INCH RECORD
Musique concrete. Guitar noodles. Speaker damage. White vinyl. Black cover.

Imperial Household Orchestra
CANADA SCRATCH RECORDS SCRATCH 23 CD (1997)
A concoction of organic and inorganic instruments, ambiances, electronics, and tape debris of real and imagined origin. Packaged in an embossed paper sleeve that seems to really confuse simple-minded people. 'How the hell do I fold it shut?' Released in 1996 by some inscrutable Canadians.

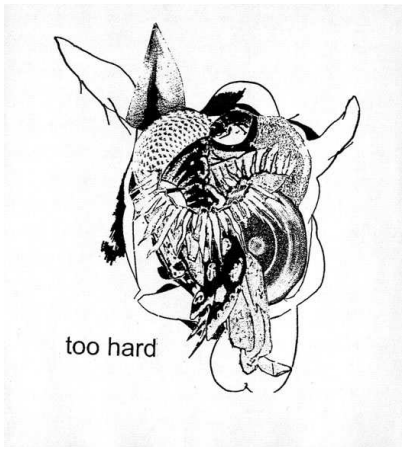
Climax Golden Twins
FIRE BREATHING TURTLE RECORDS FBT002 THREE INCH CD (1995)
'The languid stroking of gazelles, giggling Montagnard children, the smell of wild ginger, a foggy backyard, songs of Balinese showers, imaginary tropical torpor. Restrained, formally beautiful.' *ND* #20. Sparse and delicate noises, more field recordings and odd musical interludes. Released in 1995. Make sure that ceremonial hairdo is just so. Out of print.

Eyeless Fabrication
EF CASSETTES CASSETTE (1995)
Thirty minutes of noise, flap guitar, punk rock, Chinese climaxes, collage and other oddities. Released in 1995, with full color cover and hand painted labels by the now defunct EF Cassettes. Long gone, like a turkey through the straw.

Climax Golden Hiss
UNION POLE CASSETTE [1995]
Rock and skronk focused, with guitars, cellos, drums, noises off, electronics, and lots of hiss. It didn't seem that bad when it was put together but Seymour Glass described it as 'barely defined by the faded pastels of audio amnesia.no matter how high you turn up the volume, it still sounds like the speakers are in the next apartment.' *Bananafish* 11. Possibly out of print but who knows? Plenty might be lurking in the Union Pole bunkers deep beneath Portland, OR.

Climax Golden Twins
FIRE BREATHING TURTLE FBT 001 DOUBLE SEVEN-INCH RECORD (1994)
Long out of print debut, released in 1994. Oddball rock numbers, lo-fi carpets, occasional drumming, breaking glass, and an old Nepalese man's beautiful song.

Other
There are also a few compilation tracks, including a track on *My Baby Does Good Sculpture*, a CD which came with the magazine *Bananafish* 12 that included an article written by CGT. There was a track on the *Does Time Affect Memory* compilation released on the French label Amanita. There was a track on the LP *Vote Robot Versions* released on the Canadian label Vegas Records and a track on the Tinker Compilation CD , released by Tinker Records (Canada). A track entitled 'The Card Game' was included on the Anomalous Records compilation *An Uncommon Nature*.



Matt Shoemaker

Matt Shoemaker is a young soundartist based in Seattle. He makes highly processed and quiet recordings out of environmental tapes, on his computer. An abstemious producer, Matt has only released two CDs, both on the Trente Oiseaux label. Besides making music, he's a traveller, collector of exotic musics, a studious film buff and collector of DVDs and videos, and currently works at Anomalous Records.

Matt Shoemaker interview
Date: 24 April 2002
Location: A Chinese restaurant in Seattle
EP = Ed Pinsent
MS = Matt Shoemaker

EP So, Matt Shoemaker...you've had two releases so far on the Trente Oiseaux label. Anything else outside of that?

MS I should have something on the newest lower-case sound compilation. They're based in California. Really nice guy, they did a really good job with that. It takes me a long time to finish anything. I did contribute something to a Malaysian compilation, in Kuala Lumpur. I was amazed! I've been to Kuala Lumpur. I spent a month in Malaysia, I was desperately looking for something that resembled that I'm interested in. I couldn't find anything. They have a lot of death metal and speed metal there.

EP Have you always made this kind of music, or where you doing anything different before?

MS It started off a little differently, more improvisation-based and trying to put things together on that level. I play samplers and I have electronic devices. I would collage that together. It was very abstract, it was pretty out there. It moved into composition. It started with getting my hands on DAT recorders, finding I could mix stuff really easily that way. My first CD, there's no computers involved, just DAT recorders.

EP What is your method of composition?

MS The process is doing a lot of recording. Just a few days ago I went to the shopping mall and just recorded whatever sounded interesting. I take that back [to the studio] and I find something intriguing and put it into the computer. Then it can go in all kinds of different directions. Slowly I'll start building up layers and really taking my time to get it sounding just as I want. Eventually there'll be a finished piece. It's a long process. There's a lot of listening involved. Each time I make something it tends to get more involved. I try to do new things, and the possibilities are endless. You could record this meal we're having and put it into the computer and completely alter it in ways that it would sound totally alien to what it was. Trying to organise that in some way to make it worthwhile to listen to. It gets to be a pretty involved process. There's some structure that reveals itself after making these little segments and collaging them together. Then you start thinking, where should I take this? What would be the best direction to take this chunk that I'm working with? What shall I have that grow into? I will start off experimenting with something, the sound of a girl laughing in the recording that sounds interesting to me. It may end up nowhere. It may sound great for two months, than after a while I can't use it, so I scrap it. The newest CD, both of those pieces were whittled down, heavily edited from the original versions. Eventually you draw a line and say it's finished, but there's no real time limit. You can keep on returning to it, working on it, just trying to do the best you can. A lot of it can be boredom. I can't do anything more to this, it's gone far enough. I've listened to this 32nd part 500 times, it's time to move on. I try not to make it so austere and quiet that it will necessarily disappear into the environment. I think that's great that people do that, and what they do they do very well, but I don't want to be imperceptible. It's a bit overwhelming maybe to get it all in one listen. Those [CDs] are made to be returned to. Hopefully, if it works, you can go back and listen to it and you can explore it, so it's not just like a one-off. Hear new things in the detail each time you listen.

EP So the original field recordings end up completely changed and abstracted?

MS I try to keep natural qualities that are not too overly synthesised-sounding. Not too heavily treated in a way that they sound blatantly electronic. Keeping some of the essence of space that's in the recordings, keeping that intact. Definitely change them enough that they sound alien. You get that feeling it's like that whole soundscape thing, where you can make it vivid and realistic. People will say, this sounds like a forest.

EP What tools do you have on your PC?

MS I use ProTools for doing all the editing. I use various applications to damage the sounds. I use this programme called Reactor and you can build your own instruments in it. There's lots of other ones, like Maximus P, which a lot of people use on laptops when they perform.

EP Have you ever played live?

MS I have played live, every now and again. I've performed at the University of Washington and the art gallery here in Seattle, and a few other places. I don't go around promoting myself. It's a bit of work for me. I try to do things that are a little more adventurous. Take a little more risk. Might try something that I wouldn't think about putting on a release, but something for an audience to see. It's a little tricky. Sometimes you have to work with a sound system that is not quite what you would want to have, not ideal. Using extreme dynamics is a little tricky. I did one show that was entirely in darkness, so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. That would be the best way to do it. If you have the attention of an audience, people in the audience are gonna be affected by it. The whole group paying attention. You can make it sound just as you want it to sound. If I'm playing live it's really important to have that loud volume. Good bass and definition, really cranking it up. It's fun.

EP Do you ever have experiments that don't work out, ones you wouldn't release?

MS Any number of things go wrong. I have strong feelings about people that release every little thing that they do. My strategy is to do the opposite. It's not worth wasting time. It's much better in the long run to make sure that you're making the right decisions.

EP How did you hook up with Bernhard Günter?

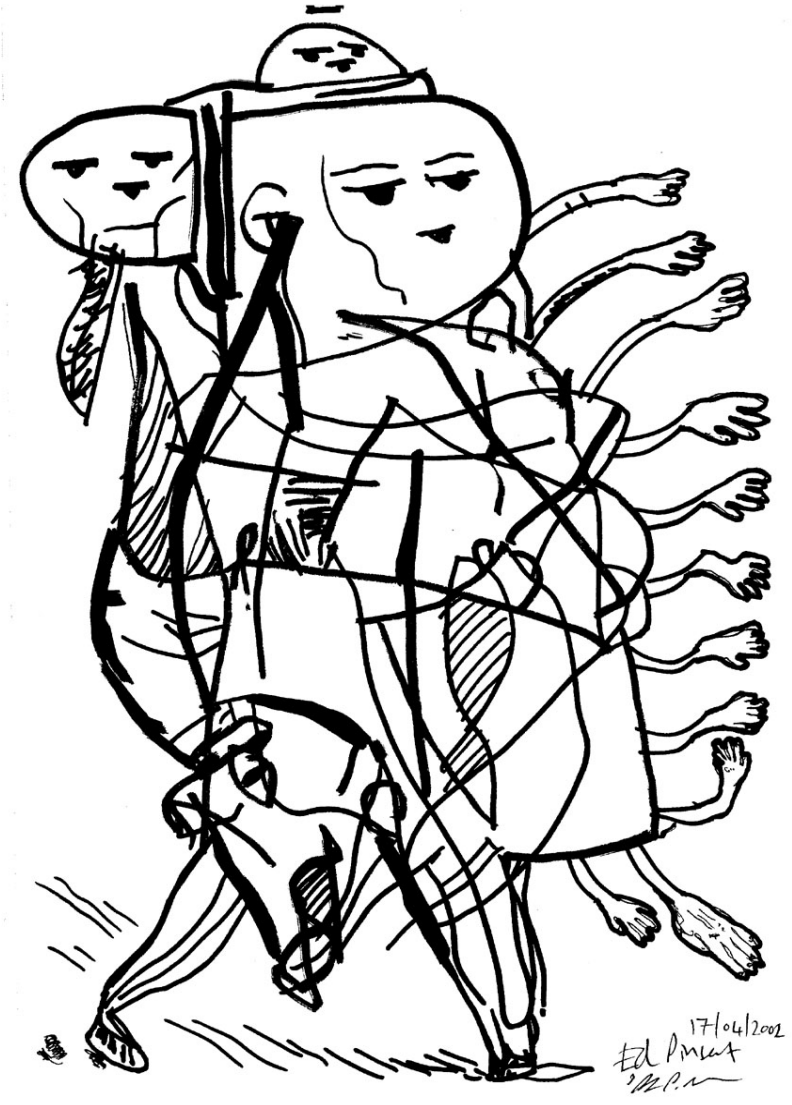
MS He offered me a release, he was really enthusiastic about it. A lot of the stuff on [Trente Oiseaux] I've been heavily influenced by. I really like it. He knows what he wants, he has a real distinct kind of idea about what his label should sound like, what it should look like. It's a good thing. Music with a strong identity. Günter sees Trente Oiseaux almost as an art project of its own. It's not just a label or a way of making a buck, it's more. Listeners may not know what they're gonna get, but at least it follows certain guidelines.

EP Are you interested in presenting your work in any kind of context? Via a press release, any kind of message you want to give?

MS The music stands up for itself. It's a big thing to wrestle with, how you want to present [yourself]. I'd like to go for the more cryptic and mysterious presentation, keep things strategically ambiguous. Instead of having tons of liner notes and all this perspective. Which sometimes is good, but other times it can overshadow what you're actually listening to. If you're getting a package, buying a CD, I like the idea of...'what is this? Where did this come from? What is this guy doing?' So [to find out] I have to listen to it. It's like a puzzle.

EP Do you listen to a lot of early electronic music, or musique concrète?

MS Once you start listening to that, everything changes. There's no going back! I did, in my teens, start listening to Xenakis and Ligeti. I wasn't listening to anything else. It was a way of rebelling against some things. A lot of my friends were into bands like The Grateful Dead. They would say this band goes out so far into this improvisation that they disappear into this bizarre music when they go into their big massive jam. It sounds kind of trippy, but...then you play some Stockhausen, it just wipes the floor with any of that, it's so out there. Nowadays I listen to music from other cultures. The real stuff. That's probably my favourite. I really like music from South East Asia, I like Indian classical music. I listen to that more than anything else. Music of Indonesia. I spent half a year travelling through South East Asia. Not going to so many places, but usually staying in some place, just trying to settle in somewhere for a couple of months. Some of the music from there is incredible. If anything, it's as crazy by Western standards as how it's made. Just seeing it performed live is just the best.



EP Do you have any views on the way electronic music is going?

MS It's just gonna get into more and more people's hands. Every month something new comes out...there's a lot of [technology] geared towards people to make their own sounds, to have some individualistic way of doing things. The technology is just getting cheaper. Hopefully it will continue that way and people will take advantage of it, make something worth listening to and doing innovative things. I can only speak for what it's like in the North West [of America]. I imagine it's probably different in other parts of Europe. It could be a bad thing. It might mean more CDs to sift through! More to listen to!

EP It's good to be democratic and everything, but what if they have nothing to say? What if they're just playing with the machine like a toy?

MS I think people should definitely have the option to release the stuff they want to. How you tell someone to stop releasing? There might need to be some new strategies developed to sift through it all and find the stuff that's most interesting. But it's so subjective. What's interesting to one person is just a cacophony and worthless for another. It's hard to decide how to organise that, but I think labels come in handy that way.

EP I was interested to hear you'd read Resonance *magazine in the UK, which turned you on to Evan Parker and Derek Bailey. What were you finding in their music?*

MS It's just alive. It's fearless. It's easy to take it for granted. These guys, what are they doing?! It must be very hard for them to go up in front of an audience and do what they do. After a while, it becomes like breathing for them. But it's shocking. But I admire their courage. It's challenging. Anything that divide a room like that has merit to it, and is worth looking into.

EP What's your next project going to be?

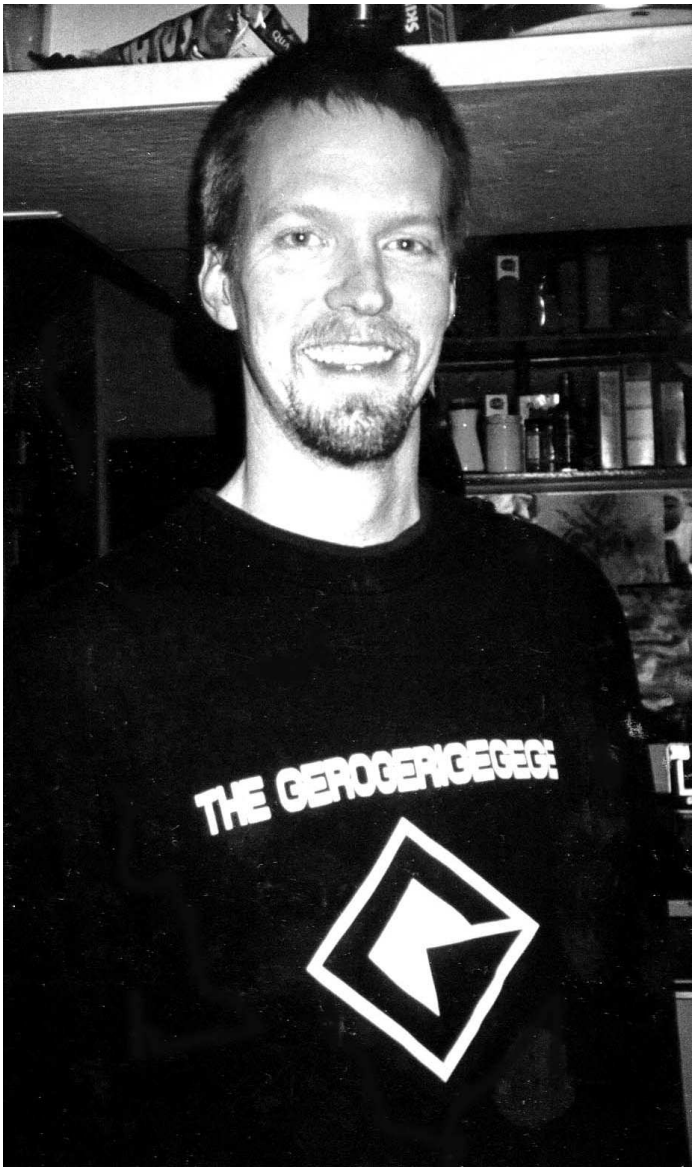
MS I want to do something based around improvisation and using the laptop, and open to collaboration with other people. Very low key, very small low key band. Take it out in front of other people and see what happens with it. Just want to try out some new ideas and keeping the computer composition thing in the forefront. That whole thing might be under a different name. Keep myself protected from it in case it's horrible!

EP Would you like you work to be totally open-ended and abstract, to the point where you almost don't care what interpretation the audience care to make of it? Or do you have a specific message?

MS I think keeping it on the edge of lapsing into complete abstraction. I'm hoping what comes across is that there's some sort of intention behind it all. But it's been encrypted to the point that it never be deciphered. That's the idea I try for. Tricky business. My favourite recordings are ones you can return to that way. They have some sort of moment that you can never really quite decipher, that's always tantalisingly there. What is that, what's the story behind that? Where's this person going, what are they doing? At the same time, trying to make it interesting sonically to the point that you can hear a new thing each time you listen to it. Hopefully, some of that comes across. □

Scott Colburn

"His Methods are Inscrutable, You See..."



'I'm an Audio Wizard!' is record-producer Scott Colburn's cheery description of his abilities. He then proceeds to back up his claim, not by cloaking his art in mystery or hocus-pocus, but by describing the painstaking processes by which he achieves his audio wizardry. The process appears to be a combination of many arts. On the 'control' side, he has technical skill, incredible patience, a sound knowledge of recording history, and an insistence on using the best possible equipment; added to this, is his skill for analysing and organising material, particularly when faced with large-scale remastering projects. But on the 'wilder' side, he trusts his flashes of inspiration, exhibits a genuine enthusiasm for wild experiment and risk-taking in the studio, and by building up a dialogue with musicians, he can elicit deep sympathy for their musical aims. This strategy is helped by his eclectic musical tastes and his ability to 'eat' his way through vast quantities of music as a musical consumer, while never allowing his listening capacities to overshadow his professional approach to recording. It takes a special kind of talent to stand with such confidence on the cusp between full control and wild experimentation...Scott projects a calm and steady exterior, yet the more time you spend in his presence the more you sense an entire legion of inner artistic demons lurking within his gaunt frame, waiting to be unleashed through the medium of modern digital recording.

Scott Colburn is generally acknowledged as the 'Fifth Beatle' in the underground combo Sun City Girls, acting as their regular producer since the *Kaliflower* LP and contributing percussion and keyboards to some of their twisted releases. And he's the mainstay third member of Climax Golden Twins, that uncanny combo of Seattle music buffs and double loon-boons Rob Millis and Jeff Taylor, whose peculiar records have enchanted and amazed dozens of listeners around the globe. Colburn is also the unofficial 'house producer' for Revenant Records, the label started by John Fahey and Dean Blackwood. Revenant has dedicated itself to rescuing and enshrining important and sometimes neglected musics from the vast range of recorded American esoterica, and Scott has been instrumental in remastering and transferring old records onto CD so as to give them a tremendous lift, punch and new shine. The best example of it is the American Primitive CD, which should be required listening for anyone with a serious interest in obscure 1920s and 1930s blues 78s, but also for anyone who just loves great music.

There's no end to the interesting projects...the ICES 72 Festival just happens to have been a preoccupation of Eric Lanzillotta at time of writing, and he was researching it in the UK in May 2002. This festival, the International Carnival of Experimental Sound, took place over 16 days in London in 1972 and featured 400 avant musicians from over 50

countries. Harvey Matusow, the organiser, was one of those mad avant-garde entrepreneurs who just don't seem to exist any more in an age when most people's stunted ambitions rise no higher than to work as a manager at a B&Q Store. Interestingly, although he entered into the technical aspects of the project (reprocessing Dolby A and reconstructing microphone arrays) with his customary zeal, Scott seems to remain sceptical of the artistic value of this brand of avant-garde music. The 46 reels of tapes he remastered were retrieved from the University of Kansas, where they'd been deposited by Matusow. The remastering may lead to their release by Anomalous Records, eventually. For further information, see http://www.anomalousrecords.com/ices.html.

Date: 16 April 2002
Location: Gravelvoice studio, Seattle USA
Present: Scott Colburn (SC), Ed Pinsent (EP)
Also present and interjecting humourous comments: Rob Millis (RM) and Jeffery Taylor (JT)

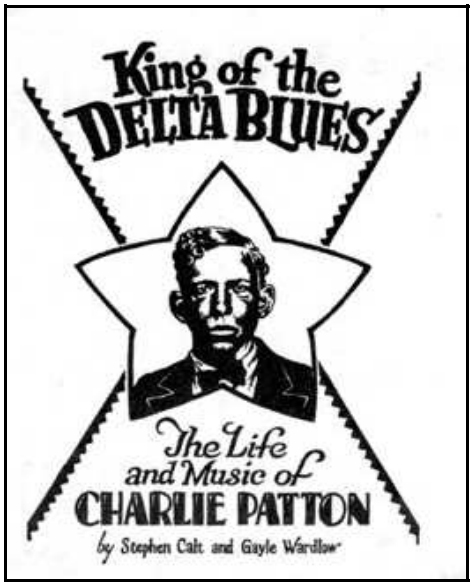
THE SUN CITY GIRLS

EP When did you come to Seattle?

SC '93, January of '93. The Sun City Girls were gonna go on a US tour, so I went on that tour and at the of the tour they said they were all gonna move to Seattle. And Rick [Bishop] actually already lived up here. I don't even know where Seattle is, but I'll go! I met The Sun City Girls in 1984. On the JFA tour, it was their first tour. They played in Bloomington Indiana, which is close to Columbus, and close to the same side, except that half of Bloomington's population is students, because of the University there. The band I was in at the time played with them, then Sun City Girls, then JFA would play. And I walked up to Alan [Bishop], because he played bass in JFA, thinking that he was Michael Cornelius from JFA...and he said, 'No, I'm Alan Bishop.' And they were in Bloomington for a couple of days before they were going to their next stop, so we hung out, and just kept in touch.

EP How long have you been working with The Sun City Girls? Ever since then?

SC No, no, they went on tour in 1990 for *Torch of The Mystics*, and I lived in Chicago at that time, and set up a show for them in Chicago. And then again, by some weird fate, they also were off for three days, so we hung out some more. And they went to my wedding, and we were moving to Los Angeles at that time, so I knew that I would be passing through Phoenix, and so I stayed at Alan's house. And I think Rick lived there at the time too. LA is in very close proximity to Phoenix, so every time they would play live, I would fly to Phoenix and record them playing live. And I recorded them playing live in Chicago as well. And when I was in Los Angeles, took four-track cassette tape to a Hollywood sound recorders. B Studio, which is where my friend Marty worked. He worked for this producer Dave Kershenbaum who was Tracy Chapman's producer. That was kind of a big deal. And the [mixing] board was massive! It was like half a million dollar board. I'm not exactly sure what it was at the time, but it was either an SSL or a Neam. And we played the four-track cassette through this half a million dollar board, and it sounded great! So we mixed it. And some of that [recording] showed up on the first record that I did for them, which was *Kaliflower*. But there was one that preceded that called *Live At Con Artists* that [?] Village had put out, which was a live recording that I did on the tour in Boston. From there on in, I've worked on everything.



EP What did you like about their music?

SC It was refreshing to hear. At that time, you know in 1984, when everything that was in my world - punk rock, or hardcore music, for them to come up and play their kind of lunacy, and knowing that it was not generally popular with everybody that was there, in that there was only really ten people watching them play. But I was just really fascinated by what it was they were doing, and it sounded interesting and it was weird. So I bought their first record, and really liked it.

REMASTERING PROJECTS for REVENANT

EP What is it you look for when you're working on a project with somebody? Can you pick and choose, or do you take whatever you're given?

SC I'm lucky that everything I'm given is actually really interesting. I haven't really turned anything down. I like a challenge. As far as serious projects go, it's been lucky that the stuff that comes through the door has been really interesting. There's an A&R guy in LA that's always amazed how much good stuff I send him all the time. He can't sign any of it, but he really likes it, the sound of it all is so diverse. He says 'where do you find this stuff?' 'Oh - the phone rang!' My association with Dean Blackwood and Revenant Records has always proven to be interesting.

EP Yes, tell me about that. You worked on this Charley Patton boxed set...

SC Yes, I've worked on almost every Revenant release.

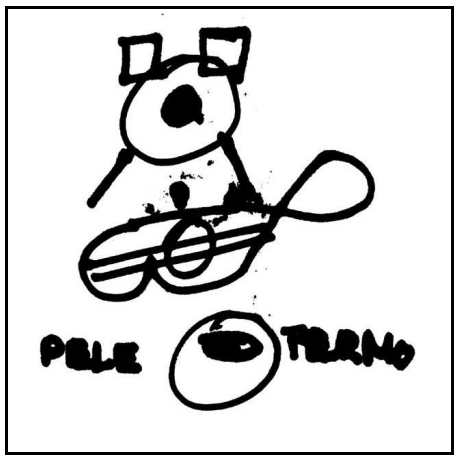
EP I think the Revenant releases are superb. I'm a big fan of blues music. And I think you're responsible for - or part of the team responsible for this, the [CDs] really defined the sound in a very exciting way. Given it a real presence. Because, these are difficult recordings to work with, they're mono, they're on scratchy 78s...

RM Exactly, they sound great!!

EP I've got a lot of LP remasters of 78s, which I prize very highly, but then when I got the American Primitive *release, I thought it was absolutely staggering. Great performances, and the sound just really...do you have a real sympathy with the music?*

SC No, not at all! No, I'm not really responsible for making the stuff sound good, as much as I am responsible for helping Dean sort it out. What I'm working on right now for him is an Ornette Coleman set. So here's all the masters for the Coleman, I mean it's massive. There's 34 masters here, and you have to make heads or tails of it. And the good thing is that Dean looks to me to put together what he wants in an order that he has conceived, or to help him decide which

version is the definitive version for him, and why. On the Beefheart, if there's 3 or 4 versions of 'Electricity', which one do we put on the set in the end? One may not be the best recorded quality, but the band just kicks ass on that particular night! Or the other one might sound better, but the other one is really the definitive performance. There's a project that hasn't seen the light of day. It's John Fahey's Fonotone recordings, that Dean had gone out to Boston, Massachusets area. Went to the guy that ran Fonotone, and got the tapes, and they transferred all the tapes. And it's my responsibility to burn them onto CD, and sort out and make sure that we've got everything.



EP I don't know Fonotone. Is that an early period of John Fahey?

RM It's a 78 label. It's actually a label started by an old ridiculous 78 collector, Joe Bussard. He's a crazy collector of American music up to 1929, and he's got the most amazing collection. One part of Scott's genius, one of the many facets of Scott's genius, is his organisational and archiv-ical, archivaling abilities! He's just amazingly well-organised!

EP When you've got a project like that, [do] you have to listen to all the masters? How do you sort them out in your mind?

SC You don't. I'm a consumer of music, and so listening to thirty-four plus hours of Ornette Coleman when the only thing that I actually own...

JT (chuckling) I can't imagine anything worse!

SC...I only own *Free Jazz* and *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. So to be immersed, paid to immerse yourself in Ornette Coleman, is not a problem. Because you listen to the music and begin to have an understanding of it, just like you could of any kind of music. You know, just immerse yourself in an artist, and figure out what it's about. So it's the same sort of thing with the Fahey project, or the Beefheart, or the Charley Patton...the great thing about the Patton project was the amount of detail that went into it, to make it the best that it could possibly be. Going so far as having somebody sit there and try to figure out what the words were, trying to figure out all the lyrics. Next to impossible! Trying to figure out what the tunings were of all the songs, and then from those tunings saying that this is the chord that's supposed to be in F, to tell the mastering engineer to pitch it up or down depending on what it is, because we don't know exactly what speed those 78s were supposed to be played at. But it's that attention to detail that makes that set so great, because this is the first time of hearing that stuff played at the proper speed, as it was recorded.

EP Didn't they do the same with the [CD reissue of] the Harry Smith Anthology?

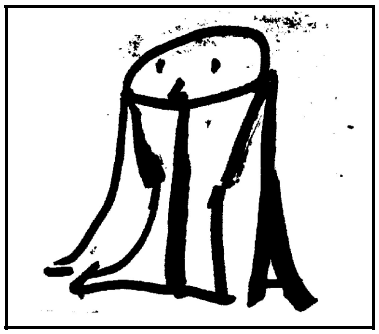
SC You have to do it, if you're gonna be accurate. That's what Revenant is about, is accuracy in the archiving of the material.

EP Why do people come to you with a project, like say Grow Fins *or the Charley Patton thing? What are they looking for?*

SC Well, Dean's a special case actually. I lived with Alan and Charlie from Sun City Girls, and we got this letter from this guy in Austen, and he wanted to release a 78 of Sun City Girls material. 'The guy is totally out of his mind! We have to do it! We have to do a 78!' So we did that record, and then that progressed from there. Dean wanted to do a double 78 of John Fahey's material. He said, 'Hey, how much would you charge me if I had you drive down to Salem and record Fahey at his home, and put out a double 78?' And then he had the third and final volume of the 78 collection, which was Charlie Feathers on one side, and a Charlie Feathers / Junior Kimbrough duet on the second side. And I mixed the duet side, and it was a tape from '69 or something, and then mastered the A side to that. From there, Dean forms Revenant and started working on all the first projects, which were - it was just a deal that Dean and I had, I knew enough about audio and he liked my sensibilities, and so he hired me to do these things. So in a way, I'm Revenant's in-house engineer, even though they don't maintain their own studio.

HE UNDERSTANDS THE PROJECT

SC To answer your question about what attracts people, is because I understand the project. I'll get contacted - like there's a guy in Japan that I do mastering for on different projects that he has. Why would a guy from Japan send masters all the way to the United States and have somebody work on them, when he probably could have the exact same thing done in Japan? But the problem is, that there might not be somebody who understands that music. It's like if Jeff and Rob, in their earliest days, were looking for a studio to record their music, who would be able to understand what they were trying to do?



RM *We* don't even understand what we're trying to do!

SC Right! But you know what I mean. In the breadth of the work that I work on...that whole top row [points to CDs on a shelf] is albums I've worked on. The stuff that is the weirdest stuff, the people come to me because I can understand the concepts of what it is they're trying to do. And it's not difficult if you're a consumer of music, if you have an idea what it's supposed to sound like.

EP And you arrive at this understanding quite quickly? Is it the same as being in sympathy with the music? Or do you just understand it intellectually?

SC Usually, I'll just talk to the artist about what it is that they want to achieve. As much as any particular band or group of people don't want to categorise their music, or relate their music to somebody else, I think it's important that you do that in order to make a connection with somebody else. And here's an example. On a Sun City Girls tour, a guy saw the soundcheck, and said 'Well you guys must really be into Zappa.' Why? Because Zappa was the weirdest thing that that guy had ever heard. Sun City Girls are nothing like Frank Zappa. But it's a reference point for that. So when I work with a group, I always say 'what are your influences? This is what I'm into - Black Flag, The Residents, and Frank Zappa and Balinese Gamelan! What are you into?' and have them tell me. I always say 'I'm not trying to compare you to those bands, but I need to know where you're coming from so you can come in and say record my music'. If a band says 'we want to sound like this particular song of Gang Of Four'. I get that particular song and listen to it - OK, now I know what it sounds like. Now I know where they're coming from and can understand it. The problem that I have is that I'm into enough bands that are obscure enough that when I say, 'you know, your band sorta sounds like X,' and they've never heard of X, but it's the best description for the band. For these guys (Rob and Jeff), I said 'Well you guys sound like Big Butter!' And it's like nobody knew what I was talking about. But I thought that their double seven-inch sounded like 'Bearded Horses' by Big Butter. And it does! But there's only 200 copies that exist. It was a green seven inch, they sold it through Ralph Records.

To me, music is sound. And I don't hear lyrics - I don't hear words, I should say. So singing to me is another instrument, as part of that pallette of sound that's put together. And so I apply that to whatever it is I'm doing, that I'm trying to create something that sounds good or is pleasing, or interesting-sounding. And whether that's rock music, or jazz, or experimental, or reggae, or whatever - it's the same application. And it's true that in its stripped-out form, its most basic form, the music is just this very nice sound. So that's what I'm doing - organising it in a way that's pleasing to myself and my client. And those are not always the same goals, but frequently they are the same goals. So if they are different, I'll do a mix for them and I'll do a mix for myself. But that doesn't happen very often.

EP So, would you say you're in quite a privileged position now?

SC Not privileged - I just feel I'm in a good position, I'm not in the position I ultimately want to be in. I don't feel that I've recorded any crap. But that's me and my world. I can only say this, there's a lot of recordings out there that are good, but I'm interested in making great recordings. And the problem is that there's a lot of people out there who call themselves engineers, and do a good job, it's like they have people happy with their work. But I'm hoping that I'm a little bit outside of that, I hope that I can think beyond that, to make really interesting great recordings. Try and bring out that something special, whatever it is. My career's actually focussing more towards film now than music. You

know, the music that we do is not gonna be commercially acceptable for a long time, and the great thing about the film is that it is commercially acceptable, so there is a market there. We're not gonna be running around in limousines and be considered rock stars, but we can do well in creating soundtracks and not really step away from our own artistic goals as well. We wouldn't have to sell out to do that, still create weird music.

A GOLDEN AGE OF RECORDING

EP Where did you learn your skills?

SC Columbia College, Chicago Illinois. It was at college, you know university-style. I actually started going to school at Indiana University, and I took the basic audio classes. When I went to the University at first, I was going to follow the path of radio and television production, because I made films when I was a teenager. And that's what I thought I was interested in, was television, and I liked radio comedy. So I thought that's what I was gonna go into, and I went into that, and really enjoyed it, but there was also another aspect of it was, like, sound engineering that I was turned on to through radio production. And so I tried to get into the radio, or the sound engineering course at that University. And the guy that was the head of the course judged me from appearance. And said I wasn't interested in what they did there, which was classical recording, and that I was interested in pop recording. I told him that he was fulla shit! And then I found a school in Chicago, at Columbia College, that had a four-year sound engineering programme and I went up there and learned it there. The difference was that my teacher was Malcolm Chisholm, and Malcolm was Chess Records' house engineer. And his big joke was - not a joke, it was true - 'I've recorded every Chuck Berry side you've ever heard, except two!' There'd be a long pause. And he'd say 'I was on vacation that week!' But, literally, he did record every Chuck Berry side. And I have a record of Ahmad Jamal, *The Flight of the Persian*, he recorded that; and I've seen his credit list, and you know Sinatra's on there, all this other stuff, these just amazing recordings. And he was a great engineer, mainly because he was a character - he was really kind of funny. And he's, in a way, a man's man - climbed mountains, swam with sharks, engines blow up in his face - the stories are just amazing. I have tapes of some of his stories from class, because they're just simply amazing. And though I may not have always agreed with his ideas about how something should be recorded or not, you can't help but take information that he gives you. This is beyond 'old school'. They didn't just go out and buy a console - they *built* the console. They bought a few microphones, but if something went wrong they had to fix it, and they built the stuff. The tape machines they would build, it was that sort of thing. And I think that was a really, really valuable education. To see what's the essence of the beginning of audio recording, and how does it work. And then apply it to the years that I'm recording, the generation that I'm recording in. I used to be up at night [worrying] or upset about 'where am I gonna come up with the 25,000 dollars it's gonna take to buy the microphones that you have to have to record?' An M-149, or RCA ribbon, C-12 or whatever, or any number of these things, really expensive famous microphones that you have to have, that cost five or ten thousand dollars apiece? How am I ever gonna have that kind of money to spend on one piece of equipment? And I just said, you know, fuck it, I'm not recording in the 1950s, I'm not recording in the 1960s, I'm recording in the 1990s! So I'm gonna buy equipment that's contemporary with the 90s, and record with that, and who knows whether any of these microphones I have on the shelf up here, are gonna be the 5-thousand or 10-thousand dollar coveted microphones of 40 years from now? Or whatever. But I buy that mike for 500 dollars now, could be worth ten grand. It's not an investment, it's just that you don't know...that marks that period of time, and that's what I'm recording [with]. And those types of microphones mark *that* period of time - it's not necessarily a golden age of recording, although it is...

RM They all are though, in their own way!

SC Yes, there's classic records made all the time.

HE'D LIKE TO RECORD CHER

EP Do you believe in the idea of visionary producers? There's all these people, like Geoff Emerick, Brian Wilson, Lee Perry, Phil Spector, George Martin...to just be a maverick and say you don't need this expensive equipment, and it's the ideas behind it that count.

SC Well, I don't know about the vision... it's a different way of working. You can go to somebody...if you approached a Phil Spector, you knew that you would get a Phil Spector-sounding recording, because he would manipulate it in that way. But then there are other engineers that don't have such a heavy fingerprint. But who knows what puts somebody on the A-List and somebody not on the A-List. If I go to Audio Engineering Society conventions now, there's this A-list of engineers. Al Schmidt, Alan Parsons, Ed Tierney, all these people that are on the A-list, and what puts them there? Bruce Sweden is one. All of these people are this top echelon. But these people are also aged. You know, they've been around for a long time. That's why they're on that A-list. If I intend to be that at some point - I mean, I'm only close to 40, I'm not 60 yet! So I've got another 20 years to achieve that A-list.

EP Who defines that A-list, anyway?

SC I don't know who defines it, it's [done] by the industry. You would think that if you're recording Barbra Streisand, then you must be a pretty good engineer, cause she's probably not going to hire some crap engineer. I mean, I've always wanted to record Cher! Because she'd got a really interesting voice. And to put her with music that is not like what she's doing now, which is kind of crappy, but to put her with something that's really kind of interesting. Maybe I'm visionary in that sense? If you say, I would have loved to record Tiny Tim - it's like an idea of a project that's visionary, how you put the project together. And you want to do this one thing, and people will laugh at you. Record Cher?! Or put Alice Cooper in a band that's really appropriate for him, rather than that LA hair-rock band. Why not? Why not do that? It would be a really good record. It wouldn't sell enough copies, probably not. I mean that's why Alice Cooper doesn't do records like that, because they're not going to sell. And that's the problem with the music industry.

EP That's more than simply asking musicians what they would like to do, that's having ideas of your own which you think you can bring to the project, and realise their music differently or slightly better.

SC You always have to think big, and shoot for bigger things. I have enough confidence in my ability that I know if I approached Alice Cooper, or whoever, and said I've got this idea for a project and I think we could do this or this, that I could execute that idea. It's not that I'm dreaming or whatever, I know I could execute that idea. The problem is getting to Alice Cooper to present him with the idea, and getting his management to understand that it's a good idea. And that's really difficult. The ideas for projects I have would make really kind of cool music, be interesting, and would kind of shake things up a little bit. Instead of being static, or trying to make music for the sense that it's gotta be a hit song in there somewhere. The record labels, at least the major labels are not made for that purpose any more. You have to make a hit, to sell a certain amount of records, and therefore it's deemed good, rather than...I mentioned this A&R guy before, that I visit; he always tells me how in today's music climate, if Led Zeppelin or The Rolling Stones or Jimi Hendrix were coming on the scene right now, they would never get signed! They would be on an independent label, because their music was just too weird or not commercially acceptable. Although Hendrix was playing all over the place and was considered a big seller. But in today's musical climate, they wouldn't get signed because they don't write hits! You know, they're not Britney Spears. It's fascinating, because these are great people, but they wouldn't have a chance today.

EP Yes, maybe there was more freedom to experiment in the 1960s and early 1970s.

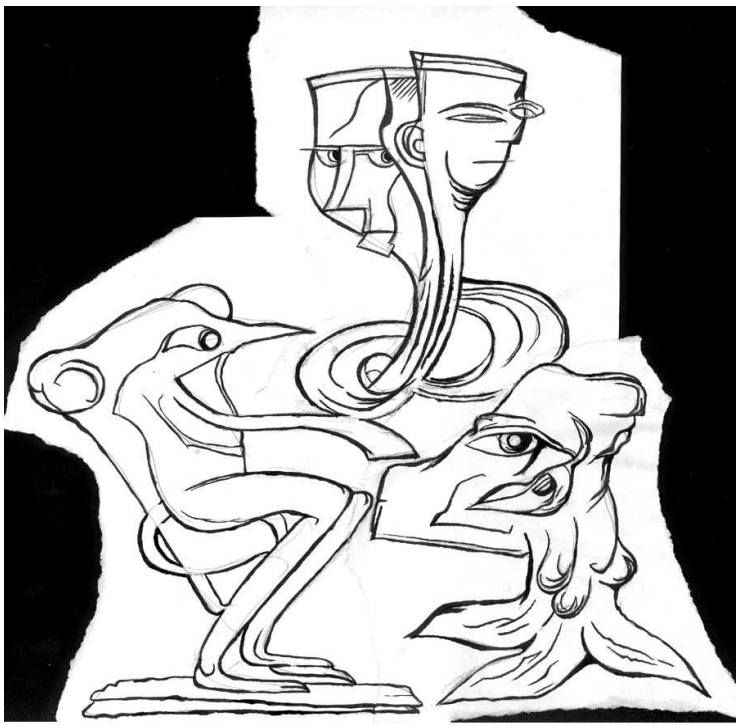
RM The commercial industry hadn't caught up with it, quite figured it out, took a little while to wrestle it to the ground.

SC What it was, was a renaissance, and Alan and I were talking about this the other day. Alan said this to me, 'in that period of time, it was a musical renaissance period, where there were no rules and everybody was into it, and it was gaining popularity, and people were more and more interested in it; and there weren't as many bands, and not as many records coming out, and people could spend time at big concerts.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF GRAVELVOICE

EP Did you build your studio yourself?

SC Yes I did. I've been here for three years in this location. It's evolved over time. The studio before this one was over when I lived with Jesse [Paul Miller] and Linda [Peschong], so it was three years in that house, and then there was a period of six months that I didn't have a studio, but I had some equipment set up in a studio apartment when I lived in Queen Anne. That's when I met Jesse and



Linda. Before that, it was exclusively Sun City Girls' studio, and that was in a house that Alan and Charlie and I shared, there was three years in that. And then prior to that I never had my own studio other than I had a four-track at home and some microphones. I would record my own music with the band that I was in or going to a studio and recording a group that I might release the record for, or something like that. If you look at my credit list on my website, those early years are really lean as far as the amount of projects. And then you can see at what point I have my own studio, because I might record 25 albums a year or something. It's a lot, but an album that I work on maybe will take two or three weeks.

EP That's very efficient.

SC Well, it's all about money! Not to me - I mean it's a matter of money to the band. The projects are self-financed and they can only afford so much studio time. I mean, there's any number of recordings that I work on that I could easily spend way more time on if I wanted to, but you have to make the best recording you can within the allotted time, within the budget that you're given to work with. Sometimes a person's budget it's just not possible to do what they wanna do. I got a call once 'We wanna sound like Metallica, and we wanna do nine songs, and we've got 150 dollars.' I said 'You can't do it for that kind of money, it's impossible!' They were a young band, and they'll learn. But that's what it all boils down to, what is the budget for a project and what can we accomplish with that, and most of the people I work with are self-financing, the label's not paying for it, there's not unlimited amounts of money available.

WORKING WITH THE TWINS

SC The Climax Golden Twins polka-dot record, that's got every trick in the book on it, that I could dream up.

RM...that you foisted upon us, yeah!

SC The whole point of that record is...I mean Climax Golden Twins, and the reason that I enjoy being in the group and working with Jeff and Rob, is because we're experimental - and we can push the limit of what we're trying to do, or ways of creating sound. And - correct me if I'm wrong, but most of our records have a concept of how it's going to be recorded, or the type of material that's going to be on it. Maybe not always adhering strictly to that, but it's not an open book like 'anything goes'. The Polka-Dot record, it's supposed to be a rock record - that's the whole thing. And to record it on the tape machine using normal rock recording methods, but then still experimenting on top of that to make the recording interesting. And that's what I mean by the difference between a good recording and a great recording. Try to make it interesting to the listener. We did a lot of different things. We recorded the snare drum through a metal tube on one song, because we thought that would be kind of cool. Well, it sounded like crap! So we did something equally as insane, to replace the snare drum on the track by taking a speaker, putting it on top of the snare drum and putting a mike next to it, and playing the snare drum track back through the speaker, so the speaker's air pressure would pop the snare. And so we'd have the same attack and the same human element to it, but it would be a completely different snare sound. Do you understand what I'm saying?

EP Yes, but how...do you think of something like that on the spur of the moment?

SC Yes. I'd read about that technique and I just wanted to try it. One time we took Rob's amp and laid it on its back, and Jeff would play the slide guitar as Rob and I swung microphones back and forth in front of the speaker. But that's another version of a technique that I had read in another book, a long time ago, that was to take the amplifier and set it upright, and one person lay in front of this amp and swing the microphone like this around the arm while another person stood up and swang a microphone in the opposite direction in a bigger circle. Which makes the sound go in and out of phase. In the stereo perspective it flies completely randomly around. And I used that technique originally on a Sun City Girls record, but we applied it to this record as well because it always works, it's always an interesting technique. But to try to find the right application for that technique is difficult. You can't just throw it in anywhere.

RM There's another good one...we probably just had the drum set up for a while and kept fucking around with it, but we had this fun thing with a cymbal and the microphone right up to it and we tried that with a bunch of different things...made this really great [thwoosoh] whooshing noise, really low woofing noise, and we tried to use that as the basis for tracks. It's kind of fun. Letting the sound build up.

EP Hmm, the level of attention to detail is impressive. You must think of everything, every bit of the recording.

SC Well, it's fun! I keep meaning to write the article of how we recorded the polka-dot record, but I doubt that we'll ever get around to it. Take each track and say, here's the weird technique that we used on it. It was fun in doing that. And also utilising the computer, even though this stuff was recorded on analogue tape, to mix it and then edit it down, sequence, chop things up, take a whole song...is it on the polka-dot record, that we took the jazz number and then I chopped it up? Just taking a piece and just start hacking away at it.

RM We did a lot editing on that record. Also really old recordings that we made before working with Scott, and stuff that Scott had recorded too, so it had a really interesting wide range of aesthetic techniques on it...really cool.

THE ICES FESTIVAL TAPES

RB Did you mention the 1972 concert that you recently archived?

SC ICES? I didn't mention that. That was a cool project. That's 46 reels of tape, roughly 46 hours of recorded material from a concert called the International Carnival for Experimental Sound - ICES. Eric [Lanzillotta] was the person behind it, he hired me to do the transfers. The tapes were recorded on four-track quarter-inch tape at 7 ½ ips, and had been sitting at the University of Kansas for 25 years untouched. People didn't really know what was on it. So we transferred all of them in four-track form and we took the - the way that the microphones were set up, because it was recorded in quadraphonic, was that there were three stages, and each stage had an identical microphone array.

EP Do you know this from archival material, a diagram, or something?

SC No, I talked to the original engineer, John Lifton, he recorded it originally and he told me what the array was. And you can hear which mike is which by listening to each individual track. The grand scheme was that with DVD and 5:1 surround systems we could actually release this in a form that people could hear it, where quad didn't work. Quad didn't get into the consumer market as big as they wanted it to, but Surround is getting into it. But all we've achieved at this point is the transfer of the tapes and doing a stereo mix of the two front mikes - that's why I explained where the mikes

were - which would be the bulk of the sound; and making a set of CDs for the University, one [set] for Anomalous Records, one for the Gravelvoice archives, and then sets for the people that invested in the project.

EP Right, so it's not going to be commercially released?

SC Not at this point. I mean it would be really great but the logistics of getting all those groups to remember...

RB Who were the groups again?

SC There were a lot of groups - AMM were playing, the Taj Mahal Travellers, a Taj Mahal side group called Transition - that particular tape is phenomenal! That's the highlight of the whole set for me, and just happened to be the first tape that I transferred. I'll say this about the whole project - the entire thing is worth listening to, there's really not a dull moment in the whole thing. However, only about a third of it is worth re-listening to. But that's still a big chunk out of roughly 50 hours of tape, saying that 15 or 10 hours is good.

EP Why do you say that? You heard it again and just thought 'this is boring'?

SC No, it's not boring. I was really fascinated by all the material that I was transferring, and I liked listening to it and it was fun, but there were particular performances that...'I kinda want to hear that Transition concert again!', where you're compelled to listen to it again, where other things like Lady June or Bread and Cheese were not as compelling, or maybe not as great a performance, to me. But that's my perception of it. I don't particularly like squonky horns! But on the other hand, the AMM set is just drums and squonky horns, and it's phenomenal - it's a really good set. Yeah, that's a great project.

EP What were the challenges facing you with a job like that?

SC One was lack of documentation, or incorrect documentation. The original engineer swears that Dolby A was used in the recording of it, and I rented some Dolby A units and found out through the whole project that Dolby A was never recorded on any of the tapes. Indeed, Dolby A was probably used in the signal chain somewhere, but was not used properly, and as the original engineer pointed out, this was 1972 and Dolby A was a new thing, and a lot of people just didn't know how to use it. And it wasn't documented as well. How do you use this thing? You have to hit record and it encodes into tape in a certain way, and when you play back you have to decode it. That was probably never explained to anybody. If you take the Dolby A unit and put it in line with something that has a little bit of hiss, and you put it into decode, it'll take some of that hiss out, and maybe that's how it was used. And so all the transfers were made straight, and I made stickers for all of the reels and put them in there and said this is what I found out. We're not sure that the track scheme on the front for how the microphones were situated is correct, because it varies. But the engineer told me that there were two machines. One machine was going, and when that was ready to run out they'd start the next one, so they doubled up on the sound, so - those are the challenges. It's like trying to retrace history. Trying to get somebody who might have been completely out of their mind, stoned, thirty years ago, to remember what they did or what they played. That's the whole reason why my website exists, to help me remember what I did! It's autobiographical of sorts, but it's also an archive or a database of what it is that I do.

EP There's been so many great [archival] releases like this recently...the Eddie Prevost Silver Pyramid record, the MEV 1969 reissue...

SC MEV were at ICES also...that tape was missing out of the project.

EP What I'm excited by is taking stuff out of the past and bringing it into the present. It has a new life, more people get to hear it, and suddenly it makes sense. Maybe people aren't ready for the Climax Golden Twins yet, but if you record it well now, it's gonna be stored up for the future.

SC Hopefully....but you're absolutely right, that ICES concert, you could never do something like that today. It was a 16-day concert! You could just not pull off something like that and it would not be...it wasn't financially viable then, it certainly would not be financially viable now.

RM And you could release a 50 CD set [of it] that would not be financially viable, but it would be kind of great! Like the Merzbow box of CDs!

WHAT MAKES A GOOD RECORDING? IS ANYONE LISTENING?

EP Are there any recordings - good examples of production - that are your favourites, that you like and that inspire you? Not stuff that you did, somebody else's work.

SC I write a series of articles about that in *Tape Op* magazine. It's a series called 'recordings that changed my life', and there are particular recordings that really had a profound impact on me at any particular time. And what I do is re-analyse the recordings as a professional audio [technician] and write about it. The reason that I haven't written very many recently is because on a lot of the records that I choose, it's hard (1) to find out where the band is or get in touch with them because they're kind of obscure, and (2) getting people to remember how things were recorded. And really, on second thought, it doesn't matter to me how it was recorded. It would be kind of interesting to say it was recorded on this kind of tape machine, but you don't buy a record because the vocals were recorded with a UA7. That's not why you buy a record. You buy it because the music moves you. *Tape Op* magazine is a technical audio magazine, so I had to write from a technical standpoint. Which really didn't work in that setting for me. The articles that I've written so far are Black Flag *My War*, which I thought was kind of a ground-breaking record for its time and I was a big Black Flag fan. Caroliner Rainbow - *Cooking Stove Beast*, that particular record. *The Jungle Book* soundtrack - it's great beat jazz! Very well recorded. Insane Clown Posse, The Great Milenko...

EP What interests me - I wouldn't understand, even if you kept explaining to me for years, what makes a good recording. But a little bit of information really helps me. When people tell me Bitches Brew *is put together through edited tapes...or you can hear the use of valve amplifiers on* Revolver *by The Beatles, or the way the Faust record was put together, by a very strange production method.*

SC It's interesting that you mention *Bitches Brew*, because that is a classic record. And these new releases of it where they put it back together, it's interesting to be able to hear the complete takes, because Miles Davis maybe never played anything back. At the same time, they edited that for a reason, and what the reasons were we don't know. Was it because the side of an album was only 20 minutes? Or it had to be edited that way? Or did they edit it out because in their opinion their playing wasn't top-notch at that point, and that stuff was not meant to be heard? I don't know what the answer is. I have this type of discussion with most of the people that I record with, because there's this idea that if you put a record out now, it has to be 60 minutes long. And before the advent of CD, that was not the case. It would be 40 minutes long, 20 minutes a side. And the thing is, a good album is not determined by how long it is, it's whether the material is consistent, and consistently good. So there are some really great Beatles records that are only 30 minutes long. If The Beatles had decided that they had to make a 60 minute *Revolver*, it could've been total crap! It could have had 30 minutes of crap on it. The problem is that people are so in tune to try and do a 60 minute or 74 minute CD, that there's a lot more filler that's put into a record, rather than editing and saying 'these are our 8 best songs - let's just put out these 8 songs and call it an album.' It's very rare that someone would put out Songs in the Key of Life, a double-record of just absolutely brilliant material, that's really rare. It's more likely that someone will come up with 30 minutes of really good material and just put that out as your album. [Out-takes and second-best songs]....those are the things that were cut out when it was limited to 40 minutes. So they should still be

cut out.

EP But the great thing [about production] is, it's all art concealing art - because you don't notice any of this when you're listening, you just get moved by the music, the whole time! You don't sit back in admiration and think 'what a clever producer Scott Colburn is'. You think 'this is fantastic!' The power of music just shines.

SC That's exactly what I'm talking about, when you mentioned before about other producers having a particular sound...I don't think that I have a big fingerprint that I put on a particular recording. But I want it be an interesting aural experience. Maybe that's kind of a lost [cause], because... I had this discussion with somebody recently, does anybody actually listen to a CD when they buy it? Or do they vacuum, watch the TV and read a book and answer email while they're listening to things? Is anybody actually paying attention to what we're doing? And most of the time, I think no. But my friend thinks that if you spent 16 dollars for a disc, sure you're gonna listen to it! That's a lot of money to spend for a record. The difference is, he says - and this is where the consuming of music comes in - it's different for you and I, because we consume that music, and are into that sort of thing, but we're kind of unique in a sense, because a lot of people don't consume music in that way. It's a background thing or something that they listen to casually. So they're not hearing it. But they're still moved by the music, and they like it. Probably the people that are into the music that we make, or stuff like it, probably actually do listen to the records, because they're that type of music consumer.

MOLES ARE COMING...

SC It was at that time (Sun City Girls time) when I got into The Residents as well. So I got into them very late in the game, but only because I had a tape of *Mark Of The Mole*, and around that period of time which is only a span of about three or four months I was in this particular apartment. I promoted a show with this band Die Kreuzen, and I had just moved into this apartment, and the show was over, and I drank a bunch of green tea, so I was like really kind of wired and couldn't really fall asleep. And I was like [thinking] 'there was this one tape I had of this music that was really weird!', pulled the tape out and played it, listened to it all the way through, and went out and bought the entire bin in the record store the next day. Picked up and bought all The Residents! But up until that point, because I had that tape for a couple of years, it was a little too weird for me at that point. Oh yeah, I forgot that...*The Mark of The Mole*, I wrote an article about...I think I'm interested in it because of the concept. And I just like dark music. And that's what I like about it. And I also like the fact that it's analogue synthesisers being played, it's not sequenced or anything like that. I don't know, it's just so hard for me to describe, it's a personal thing. I mean, I did describe it in my article, but I still don't think that I actually scratched the surface about what moves me about that record.

I made most of the miniature samples that are on the Ralph Records website, when you look at a particular album and click on the Real Audio thing, I made all those miniatures. I did it from the remastered things, I just took each album, I listened to it, and said 'this bit and this bit put together in this way represents this record.' So that was really a great joy for me, to take entire Residents records and condense them down to two minutes, and it usually consisted of about three or four cuts from different pieces, but melded together in a cross-faded way. They're really works of art in a sense, but they're kind of lost in the Real Audio format. I keep meaning to make a CD for myself of the original full masters, but it was fun [to do].

EP Is there a chance you could work with The Residents on a record?

SC Probably not. I really feel that they do [need a producer]. I mean, you've seen them live. Did you see the Cube-E tour? Really good, but how does that translate to *The King and Eye* record? What I feel is that if they did it in the way that they do their things, the way they make records and then tour that record. They would actually benefit from touring the music [first] and then recording it, which in fact they did with *Wormwood*. They released the CD called *Roadworms* and it was recorded after the tour, so it had much more of a raw feel. We're talking about vision...I have a vision for a Residents recording that I would do. When you went to see *Wormwood* and you witnessed that on stage, it had a certain quality to it, especially when the band would really get into it and they were playing like a band. It was exciting, and there was something going on there. To capture that excitement on tape is something that they've really never done. Nobody's actually done it yet. And I just think it's because a lot of engineers are trying to get a good technical recording and that's not really what The Residents need to capture the energy. They need to play it live, and they need to be on a stage, or set up like a stage, and do it like they do it, and then you'll get that energy. I have discussions with them all the time about doing different things, but I don't think anything's ever gonna come of it. It's a bummer, but they don't really need me to put out records, and it's not like what I'm gonna do is gonna make the record sales go up. They'll sell the same amount of records whether I do it or not, so that's what it boils down to.

HE'S AN IMPRESSIVE CHARACTER

SC My career and the type of music that I work with is varied enough that you have to assess the person's musical tastes in order to say the right things to them. As much as nobody wants to name-drop or say 'I dig this or I dig that', in this business that's how you get people to listen to what you're talking about. So if I say 'Hey, I'm the Sun City Girls' engineer and I recorded their last 15 records', it means nothing to somebody who doesn't know who Sun City Girls are. But somebody who does know who The Sun City Girls would be 'Wow! That's really cool!' you know, they're impressed by that. If they're not impressed by Sun City Girls, then I say 'well I recorded some stuff for the new Mudhoney record.' And somebody [else] is impressed by that.

JT I've always been impressed with Scott, actually...he's an impressive character.

RM Yeah, not to mention imposing...and threatening!

[Referring to a cartoon image of Scott on the wall]

JT His brain is heavy. He keeps it propped up to one side with a stick! He can record the sound of your eyes closing, and the loudest rock band in the world! His methods are inscrutable, you see!

RM That's a testament to how impressive I think he is!

SC I'm impressed by it all! I like what I do! And I do a good job of it!

www.gravelvoice.com

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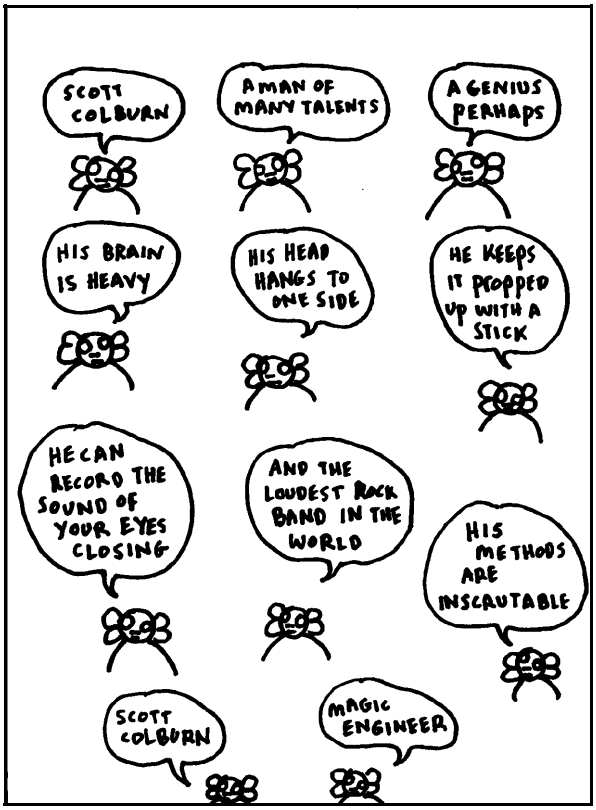

SCOTT COLBURN
A MAN OF MANY TALENTS
A GENIUS PERHAPS
HIS BRAIN IS HEAVY
HIS HEAD HANGS TO ONE SIDE
HE KEEPS IT PROPPED UP WITH A STICK
HE CAN RECORD THE SOUND OF YOUR EYES CLOSING
AND THE LOUDEST ROCK BAND IN THE WORLD
HIS METHODS ARE INSCRUTABLE
SCOTT COLBURN
MAGIC ENGINEER

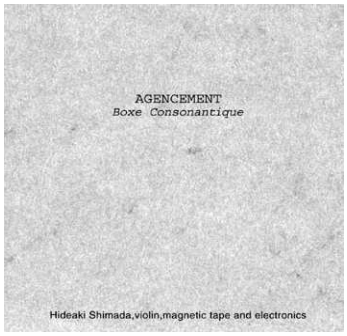
Music from JAPAN

✤✤✤✤ OUTSIDER GUNSLINGERS in a SACCHARINE WALTZ ✤✤✤✤

Agencement
Boxe Consonantique
JAPAN PICO 04 CD (2001)

Five and twenty stars are awarded with no hesitation to this loner Japanese acrobat. It's a formless, chattering, rambling, scraping din - an absolutely lovely din, of course - which treads the line between coherence and gibberish for a long and exceptionally tense episode. He does it using only an acoustic violin, tape, and live electronics. Tension? This is so wound up, it could power a washing machine on spring-loaded dynamics alone...and it's a razor sharp recording, giving maximum 'room presence' even in warm temperatures, one that documents the instruments and the wild playing so faithfully that the very tautness of it will garotte you, snap your neck and slice off all your limbs. A veritable hornet's nest full of barbed-wire sandwiches.

Hideaki Shimada has been sawing his violin in a very mad way since the 1980s. He started making public appearances as Agencement in 1985, and appeared before audiences in art galleries until they realised how dangerous he was, whereupon he was pitched back out onto the street. His process is based simply on the sound of the violin, which fascinates him - he loves the 'mysterious exquisiteness of this musical instrument' and at first he wanted no other source of sound. By 1991 at least he was open to the possibility of other available enhancements. There's something semi-magical about his current use of electronics, which he uses to 'change acoustic materials into chemical ones'.



Agencement's reasons and motives for improvising are based on private impulses and highly personal. He references his early childhood, as manifested in his drawings, which he revisits; in fact his first two LP covers are made from these drawings. As far as I know he always plays solo, which makes him something of a lone-wolf in today's promiscuous avant-muso world where virtually everyone plays with everyone else eventually. And he's an abstemious wolf at that - this is only his fourth release. And what a scorcher it is too. If you want to bounce your mind on the sound of his resonant strings like a gigantic mental trampoline, then seek ye out a copy of this buried treasure.

ED PINSENT 02/11/2002

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Koji Asano
January Rainbow
SPAIN SOLSTICE 27 CD (2002)

A rainbow in the winter - a thing seldom seen, and natural phenomena seldom heard is what Koji usually aims at, shooting his musical crossbow high in the sky. His long, testing releases explore one single idea at a time. This one is particularly odd. There's about three elements going on - (1) a series of romantic piano inventions, utterly concealed under (2) a layer of thick white noise, with (3) a further layer of occasional noisy interruptions (firedoors shutting, strange hissing emissions, and indistinct clunking). It's rather alarming - particularly as the white noise is somewhat harsh and shows no signs of going away. It's like trying to sleep in a small plastic tent in the middle of an hour-long hailstorm. Drink cold vodka for comfort, and your skin turns blue out of sympathy.

At first, you may make the assumption that you're being asked to listen to the piano music, but you can't because the distorting white noise is getting in the way. After 10 minutes you realise it makes more sense to listen to everything as though it's one coherent piece of sound. This way, it starts to make sense and in a way it even becomes quite enjoyable. A simple lesson in listening, perhaps, but a useful one.

ED PINSENT 08/12/2002

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Koji Asano
Octopus Balloons
SPAIN SOLSTICE 28 CD (2002)

Yeesh - lemme outta here!! Despite the 'festive' holiday-mood title suggested by these freekin' *Octopus Balloons*, this release ain't no trip to the funfair...it is sheer murder...maybe 'sea urchins' would have been a more apt image, on account of this harsh music is so spiky, spiny and spindly. What inspired the gentle Koji on this unexpected course of violence? Maybe he saw a balloon vendor in the streets in Barcelona one afternoon, after eating a tainted dish at a Sushi bar. Or perhaps the sport of inflating live octopoids with helium is an accepted pass-time among the cruel Spanish...in any case the 'diary' aspects of the work of this hyper-productive young Japanese genius clearly demand that anything and everything become grist to his electronic mill. Koji's work is mostly about the sound he makes, and in this case the sound (though highly distinctive) is next-to unapproachable. This

release is almost like a sarcastic version of techno / dance music as realised by a crusty old hermit who never went near a night club (and a good thing too, says I). Poisonous, dwarf-like compacted pockets of evil noise are unleashed into the ether, forming a haphazard yet insistent rhythm as they clash and bump against each other in unpredictable patterns, causing each barbed seed-pod to explode and abrade against the side of your head in vengeful fashion. Buzzy burrs and ratchetty clack, an attack of the giant hogweed. If you can endure this monstrous treatment until the halfway mark (it's only a 33 minute CD, thankfully), you'll be rewarded with a double dose of punishment, as Asano ups the ante and redoubles the violence of his onslaught. Everything is sped up to twice the tempo and inflicts up to ten times the damage - not a bad start to the week I guess.

Koji's latest batch of work has been arriving in thin card sleeves, yet despite their slim dimensions these wallets contain far more compressed energy in the discs than seems humanly possible. In this case, the energy may appear to be a negative, anti-human force, but it isn't really...it's absolutely dynamic, and stands close to redefining the meaning of that word in the musical context. Not a bit like the (now) traditional notions of 'Japanese Noise', whose Dada-like brutalism and crude barbarity has already become nostalgia...the standpoint of all that music, much as I love it, has been predicated on the idea of advancing relentlessly forwards all the time, just doing it in a much speedier and obnoxious fashion than the human frame can tolerate. Koji's elements, by contrast, are strangely inert; he prefers to stay in one place and see what comes to him. The dynamism emerges from the way he controls the process, as though he were performing micro-surgery on a very specific locale in the human body. I'm sure that the true significance of this music will only become clear after another 20 years. Buy it now and you'll be glad you did - rewire your brain to adjust itself to the unbearable barrages of the black balloons of the future. An ultra-intense and relentless ride through the stratosphere. Hitch your wagon to an Octopus Balloon today, if you think you're man enough.

ED PINSENT 03/11/2002

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Ground-Zero

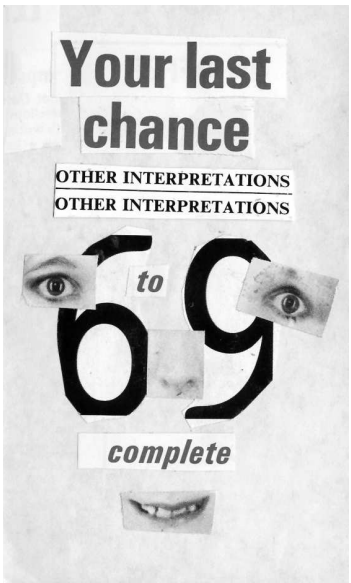
"Plays Standards"
UNITED KINGDOM RER MEGACORP RER GZ3 CD (2002)

The latest 'swansong' release from the 1990s Japanese amazo-combo that refuses to die. Led by Otomo Yoshihide, Ground-Zero were an 8-piece guerilla team of crack musos who could deliver atom-blast genre-hopping musical extravagances with the pinpoint accuracy of a flash-bomber assassin armed with 200 laser beam bazookas. Space-Age crazies from Planet Fun-Droid. They broke up some years ago after Otomo reached some sort of personal and financial crisis; unable to maintain the payroll for such a large touring band, and more interested in pursuing quieter and simpler work through ISO, Filament and Cathode, and jazz-based music in his New Jazz Quintet. (See TSP 7th for this story, if you can find a copy).

This CD is a reissue of a 1997 record that originally appeared on the Japanese Disk Union label; all credit to Chris Cutler to getting this monster together after about 5 years of patient negotiating. These 12 tracks represent the violent and noisy attempts of Ground-Zero to render cover versions of some of Otomo's favourite musics; instead of playing standards, they massacre them. Vinyl records are present, either as another additional layer in the overpowering mix, or used as the starting point for these insane cover versions. Two pounding drummers; the mad wailing sax of Kikuchi Naruyoshi; and tons of horrible heavy guitar indulgence from Otomo and Uchihashi Kazuhisa. Never have Ground-Zero so closely resembled

The Glitter Band - which is the highest compliment I could pay anybody.

The catalogue of covers is an inspired mix of high and low art, executed with a gleeful plundering of sources that few could manage without appearing ironic; Otomo, clearly, loves all this stuff with deep affection and draws no boundaries as regards what is culturally acceptable. Free improv and free jazz rub shoulders with 'Ultra Q', the theme tune from a junky Japanese TV science fiction show; there's a Hans Eisler composition, pop music, avant-rock, easy Listening, Burt Bacharach, and even a Sousa march tune. Nothing is sacred (everything is sacred). 'Akashia no Ame ga Yamu Toki' rebuilds a free sax solo by Kaoru Abe using two noisy guitars to approximate that wailing sheet of sound. 'The Bath of Surprise' is an eccentric reworking of a Steve Beresford / Misha Mengleberg piece, complete with the playful Otomo blowing bubbles and splashing in the tub. 'Those Were The Days' lays into the Mary Hopkins song penned by Paul McCartney with the violent determination of a



demolition crew, yet as they tear it limb from limb they open new spaces in the original that makes even this piece of cornballery acceptable, somehow.

The band's version of Fred Frith's 'Bones' demonstrate their incredible stop-start dynamics and one of the reasons why people's jaws drop when hearing Ground-Zero; nobody can possibly play such complex music with this single-minded precision, not even one of Zappa's fascistic big-bands led by Steve Vai. Of course, the high-flown pomp and bombast of this cut - and indeed of the three massive opening tracks, which will soon separate the pikes from the minnows - may not be to everyone's tastes. If so, why not skip to 'Miagetegoran, Yoru no Hoshi wo', probably the best cut on the CD. A psych instrumental of breath-catching beauty, packed full of overblown genius. Originally composed by Izumi Taku and performed by Sakamoto Kyu, who has been Otomo's 'greatest idol for as long as I can remember'. I have no idea when this song dates from, but it sounds like idealised 1960s psych. 'The song continues on a journey for eternity without finding resolution,' claims Otomo in his version. Brother, you won't want that journey to end.

As a rather downbeat contrast to the sonic mayhem on disc, we have Otomo's genteel and discursive commentary in the booklet, where he expresses his fondness and enthusiasm for the various records which are covered, and gives freely of his personal stories and history of buying and hearing records as a student in Japan. You can't doubt that this man loves recorded music with a depth and a passion that most of us can only dream about; and he hears so much in the records, he must have ears the size of the mainsail on the Cutty Sark. Eine fantastiche release.

ED PINSENT 24/12/2002

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Hoahio

Happy Mail

JAPAN AMOEBIC AMO-HOA01 CD [1997?]

A mixture of live and studio recordings, this CD is the first of two albums recorded by the original all-female 'supergroup' line-up of Haco, Sachiko M and Michiyo Yagi, the second being *Ohayo! Hoahio!* released on the Tzadik label in 1998. Haco seems to be pretty much the leader here, having written all the material, done most of the singing and played most of the instruments (and she still leads Hoahio albeit with a shifting all-female line-up).

Cheerful and off-kilter poppy music using instruments like toys, a theremin and an out-of-tune guitar and which sounds neither Western nor particularly Eastern is the Hoahio way. The title track sets the pace with its Kraftwerk-meets-Toys R Us mechanical rhythm over which Atsushi Tsuyama of the Acid Mothers Temple collective hums as if he hasn't got a care in the world despite having quirky little noises zinging at him from left, right and centre. Another memorable track is 'Less than Lovers, More than Friends' (unforgettable title, that!) whose strummed guitar rhythm and spacey effects would send it to the top of some American college radio station playlist if only American college radio stations knew of this song, to the delight of those bored by Courtney Love's hypocritical posturings.

The album isn't all just pop songs however: there are also more improvised and experimental pieces like 'Morning Stars', 'TRAP Crickets' which features found sound recordings and 'Ricardo Sex' which delves into an industrial aesthetic at one point. I have trouble picking out Sachiko M's sampler (though maybe on this album it's not empty) but you can definitely hear koto player Michiyo Yagi coming to the fore on tracks like 'GINGA' and the mellifluous 'Fake Arabesque' where she almost plays solo to replicate the sound of an oud (a Middle Eastern stringed instrument like a lute). In summary this album is sort of a microcosm of what Haco and friends do at a highly accessible and enjoyable level and so it's an excellent introduction to the work and style of Haco who deserves more and wider attention than she currently gets. (Compare her to Bjork who's been slogging around the pop circuit for over 15 years now and whose 'exotic' elfin-girl image and vocal style seem not to have changed much during all that time and you get my gist ...)

JENNIFER HOR

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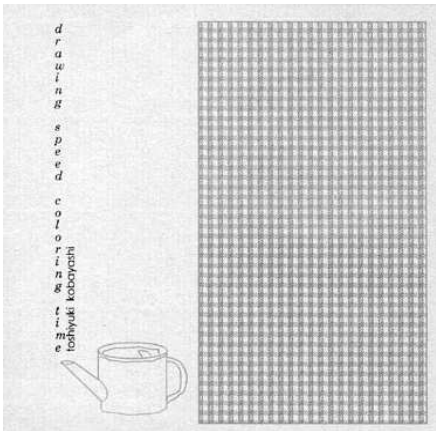
Hoppy Kamiyama

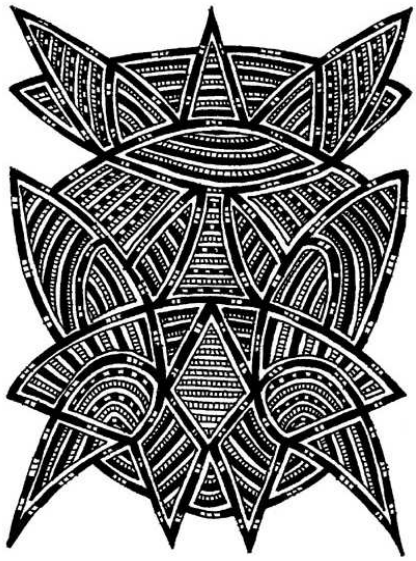
Juice and Tremolo: the works of chamber music

FRANCE SONORE SON-02 CD (2002)

A good introduction to the music of Hoppy Kamiyama, this CD spans Mr Hoppy Happy's work from 1990 to 1997 with one track - a not very rivetting piece of insect sound symphony - claiming a recording date of 2006 but as I regard insect sound music to be pretty much timeless (insects not being partial to the latest fads in music), who am I to dispute whether this track will be recorded in 2006 or was recorded only yesterday? Anyway, the point of this CD is to demonstrate the variety of musical genres Kamiyama has found himself working in and the ease with which he moves from, say, writing music for TV commercials or for a string quartet to performing with his avant-rock prog band Optical-8 (which briefly counted Otomo Yoshihide as a guitarist among others) to running a record label. The music offered here is not very extreme, though that should not be construed to mean Kamiyama is incapable of performing such music; most of the tracks are quite pleasant and melodic if rather repetitive at times (a deliberate decision on Mr K's part) and stopping and starting quite a lot yet successfully straddling the sometimes thin and sometimes abysmally wide divide between the mainstream and alternative depending on the context.

The best track is 'FFF', on which the Saito Neko Quartet repeat four bars of music constantly (and during which the musicians sometimes perform feats of technical virtuosity to the point where the music is almost unbearable), punctuated by intervals where Kamiyama cues the performers or the audience to laugh or make noises with cue cards; the divide between performer and spectator dissolves and humour, 'spontaneous' noise and even applause become part of an otherwise quite formal performance of post-classical music. Other outstanding tracks





include 'Fantasm*B' which combines a different string quartet with metal percussion courtesy of *Tetsuo: Iron Man* music soundtrack creator Chu Ishikawa, though here his metal bashing is not as hard-hitting as his more famous creation; and 'Fresh for the Jet Set' by Optical-8 (unfortunately an Otomo-less version) which is as heavy metal and noisy as Hoppy Happy gets here. At the halfway mark, it's time for some meditative solo piano which leads us 14 minutes later into a series of TV commercial soundtracks of which the Chugoku Electric Power piece, slamming together a saccharine waltz with fast-paced and cheeky brass band music, is the best with the Toyota Hilux Surf ad music (African-inspired, featuring a band called Vundumuna) and the Japan Tobacco piece (sort of Irish-African sounding) not far behind. These short soundtracks perhaps demonstrate best Kamiyama's talent and confidence in mixing and experimenting with different musical styles under constraints that might hinder and limit other musicians into producing something bland.

Somewhere in *Juice and Tremolo*... you'll come across a punk aesthetic, performance art, a bit of noise, a lilting Celtic melody, an environmental soundscape, maybe even a piece where you expect Keiji Haino to make an appearance with his tortured tonsils ... yep, our man Hoppy Kamiyama does it all with a refreshing eyelash-curling style!

JENNIFER HOR

www. sonore.com

Toshiyuki Kobayashi

Drawing Speed Coloring Time

SPAIN LUCKY KITCHEN LK018 CD (2002)

Another charming and gentle comfortable socks-player arising like a plastic helicopter above a tormented spell of grief and solitude. The Lucky Kitchen label based in Spain, a small pocket of necessary absurdity in today's boring and predictable over-rational music business, issues these periodic reports of international music creations; its owners, Alejandra and Aeron, are the charming young couple who tend to cultivate those musicians and composers who are most

like themselves. As lovers of fantasy, quaint narrative, story-book pictures, field recordings, rusticity and slightly effete electronics, their attachment to Toshiyuki-san is understandable.

Where a previous (unconnected) Lucky Kitchen release *I Love Fantasy* dared to probe the nine mysteries that encircle our known universe, *Drawing Speed* takes a microscope to examine a smaller, more manageable theme. This nifty LP-length release comprises nine instrumental miniatures, fully-realised works which purport to express the distinctive qualities of COLOURS - and combinations of said colours, as expressed in the curious little titles such as 'pale_portrait_pink_viridian hue_olive'. As he laps up the bright pigments in his paintbox, like Van Gogh eating his own oil paints, Toshiyuki utilises many delectable modes of composition and a delicious range of novel sounds. Mostly electronic and small and intimate sounds, very homespun and very pleasing to the ear - with some additional found materials like rainfall and traffic sounds. Loops, gentle whirlpools of sound that are almost like miniature ornamental gardens. Essentially static, each piece goes nowhere - yet surrounds the listener with a pleasant watercolour miniature for five minutes, before you turn the page and examine the next tableau. Recommended.

ED PINSENT 02/11/2002

www.luckykitchen.com

Maher Shalal Hash Baz

Maher on Water

UNITED KINGDOM GEOGRAPHIC GEO16CD CD (2002)

As that cliché goes, the best things in life are often the simplest and for once this banality rings true in this case of this delightful gem of an EP from the primitivist psychedelic dream pop orchestra Maher Shalal Hash Baz. Ten songs boasting simple yet hummable melodies that stick in the brain forever, lashings of carefree, doe-eyed innocence, superficially shambolic playing that actually masks polished musicianship and arrangements, and some surprisingly dark and shadowy moods turn on the general theme of water within the space of only fifteen minutes. Only fifteen minutes! You do not need more proof that here is a genius band at work - MSHB achieve in only fifteen minutes what most bands labour a lifetime to capture even a fraction of. Everybody else should just give up and let Kudo and Co take over the world (which Kudo might have tried to do more than a decade ago but more on that later).

The EP divides into a studio half and a live half; the live half took place in the Bears venue in Osaka, scene of what must be innumerable classic episodes in the history of Japanese underground music and as deserving of everlasting fame and pilgrimage as CBGBs in New York or The Cavern in Liverpool. In this part of the EP is my favourite track, 'Blues de Jour' which is a minimalist repetition of a tune the likes of Nick Cave or Ennio Morricone would kill several times for to have written themselves: it's a sombre little Gothic number done with trumpet, stark blues guitar, sparing percussion and organ-like keyboard, very short but full of unplumbed depth. Hilariously this piece is followed by the peppy and completely guileless 'Good Morning' - MSHB must surely be a bunch of nuts to do a sequence like this. Despite the apparently inane lyrics, this little number features several key changes and adept guitar strumming. Another memorable piece is 'Haiku of Shurindo' which sounds slightly like a skeleton genesis for a soundtrack to a 60s spaghetti or paella Western where the main character is an outsider gunslinger roaming a pseudo-Arizona desert from one town to another. Except that this Western would feature an all-Japanese production crew and set of actors and the gunslinger would adhere to the code of bushido in the style of Jim Jarmusch's movie *Ghost Dog*. The live tracks are introduced by Shinji Shibayama who through his Org label has assisted MSHB over the years and himself leads the equally ingenuous psychedelic folk band Nagisa Ni Te.

The cultivated naivety of MSHB masks a long and almost operatic history which includes the suicide of a violinist, MSHB head honcho Tori Kudo's politicial activism (which nearly got him into trouble when the anarchist group he was mixed up with attempted to assassinate the Japanese emperor), his self-exile in London, a chance meeting on a building site that led to MSHB's formation and Kudo's conversion to Christianity. Eccentric and strange Kudo may be but to survive in a society as rigidly conformist, authoritarian and hierarchical as in Japan where the individual counts for very little, it is perhaps necessary to be an odd bod and it is telling that Japan seems to be full of such people in the creative pursuits; the musical approach of MSHB, Nagisa Ni Te and others like them would probably be as much of a puzzle to most Japanese as it is to Westerners but for different reasons - cuteness is part of the modern Japanese culture but these bands seem to use it in ways that subvert expectations and conventions of their society which I have to admit I find quite unfathomable.

JENNIFER HOR

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Kawabata Makoto

Infinite Love

UNITED KINGDOM OCHRE RECORDS OCH031LCD CD (2002)

An improvised guitar solo offering from the Acid Mothers Temple leader joins an ever-growing mountain of recordings by solo guitarists consisting of nothing but ... improvised solo guitar. Fortunately many of these recordings have set new standards in guitar-based creativity and originality - unfortunately *Infinite Love* cannot be ranked among them. The style of music featured here recalls various American ambient guitar bands that I used to consider essential listening (back in 1995/6 - don't laugh): Doldrums, Labradford, Magnog and Windy and Carl. There was a Windy and Carl album called 'Depths' of which the music would be pretty much interchangeable with the music on 'Infinite Love': dreamy, shimmering, slightly hallucinatory but most of all repetitive and if stretched over 10 minutes on each track as on *Infinite Love*, yawningly boring. At least the American duo enlivened their recording with a bit of murmured singing and some simple guitar melodies; we get no such relief from Kawabata here.

I managed to find some fault with all three tracks (picky, I know): the first track exemplifies the problem stated above: the second, 'I Miss You', had the potential to be a minimalist guitar exploration but falls into the same rut as its predecessor; the title track is at least atmospheric and includes forms of expression different from what I usually associate with Kawabata (he has at times given the impression that he only knows two moods on previous stuff I have heard: loud/fast and not-so-loud/not-so-fast) but at about 40 minutes it's probably far too long for music that is often quite threadbare and some tightening and pruning would have improved it. It would have been better for Kawabata to have released this track on its own as an album-length single and to keep the other tracks for re-use on some other project.

I suppose you all want to know what other musical misdemeanours I've committed over the years - ah, too many to mention I fear: I used to think Godflesh and early Pitch Shifter (!) invaluable; then there was a time when I was a doom metalhead and had to have every recording by Cathedral and My Dying Bride; then there was the pretentious and laughable Swedish duo Ordo Equilibrio with their bondage fixation and execrable neo-fascist lyrics - forgive me, O August and Venerable TSP Editor for I have sinned most grievously ... and by the way, that lot is only just the beginning...

JENNIFER HOR

www.ochre.co.uk

Nagisa Ni Te

Feel

USA JAGJAGUWAR NO NUMBER CD (2002)

We have ten slow songs performed on acoustic instruments with the occasional psychedelia-influenced guitar solo and sung in Japanese by Shinji Shibayama who used to play in a band founded by an ex-Hijokaidan member and clear-voiced Masako Takeda, both of whose main lyrical concern on *Feel* is that when boy meets girl their hearts always beat as one and when that happens, time and nature revolve around shining young love that yearns to go on forever in an endless summer tinged with wistful and gentle 60s-styled folk pop psychedelia. Such nostalgia together with a brief digression to remember a long-gone dog in 'Song for Malo' infuse the music with a charm beyond the reach of Fennesz, the Silver Mount Zion folks and indeed anyone else attempting the same. The remarkable aspect of *Feel* is its utter sincerity, bereft of the cynicism and irony that musicians outside Japan would be unable to hold back were they to do a recording even remotely similar; the wide-eyed innocence of the music is enhanced by Takeda's singing which makes her sound as if she's barely out of primary school but without any cloying and saccharine qualities we might expect out of such singing.

The restraint and sparseness of the music belie the fact that Shibayama and Takeda play an astonishing array of instruments including the plaintive ocarina on one track, backed by various musicians of whom Naoki Zushi plays 'restrained lead guitar' on one song and 'unrestrained lead guitar' on another, though given the musical arrangements the 'unrestrained' guitar solo could easily have been handled by a gagged and straitjacketed Jimi Hendrix on a one-stringed guitar were he still alive. Only 'Strength of the

Waves' (many of the song titles are similarly po-faced quaint) threatens to 'kick out the jams' but just a little. There's another song somewhere featuring 'seaweed guitar' which doesn't sound like anything out of the ordinary but in the studio it probably smelt like something out of the ordinary.

For all the things in its favour, I find *Feel* to be pretty slow and wearying as the songs never move any faster than snail's pace for a total playing time of 62 minutes. If you understand Japanese, you may find the lyrics and subject matter bland while the rest of us may experience the singing as just another element in the music. How straight-faced Nagisa Ni Te are in performing this music is another thing; I understand Shibayama used to front another group doing much the same kind of music. Anyway, if you hanker after an innocent, pristine world in which two young lovers walk hand in hand in a flowery meadow under a shimmering summer sky while simple pop lullabies hum around them, this recording may suit you.

JENNIFER HOR

www.jagjaguwar.com

The Taj Mahal Travellers

July 15, 1972

JAPAN SHOWBOAT/SKY STATION (ON LICENCE FROM SONY JAPAN) SWAX-501 (TDCD 90621) CD (REISSUED 2002)

One of a batch of albums recorded by the seventies psychedelia band The Taj Mahal Travellers and their leader Takehisa Kosugi when he went solo and now reissued nearly 30 years after their original release dates for all those who, like me, missed out the first time because we were too young or weren't even a twinkle in our fathers' eyes yet. This album's title refers to the date when the music was recorded at Sohgetsu Hall and the tracks themselves have no 'titles', just indications of what the musicians were up to between the times they started and stopped recording in the evening. Yes folks, if you haven't already guessed, this is an album of live improvisation.

Highly idiosyncratic and unstructured, the music is as far away as you can get from most seventies psychedelia, most of that grounded in conventional rock rhythms and structures, so much so it seems sacrilegious to lump Kosugi's Krew with the likes of Pink Floyd who seem positively lumpen compared with this lot. The first track is a foggy piece of ambience in which beached whales, given voice by electronic trumpet, electronic contrabass, harmonica and various other (often quite primitive) electronic devices, call out to one another in the vain hope of being rescued. There are spaces so deep in the music that a pod of dolphins could get lost in them and these spaces magnify the desolation of the luckless leviathans suffocating under their own bulk. Rattles, sharp percussion and laughter appear later in the track - perhaps a tribe of hunters has seen the whales and everyone is rejoicing at seeing this unexpected feast after days and weeks of eating weeds and insects. Soon the trumpeting stops and we hear the winds sweeping away the echoes of the animals' plaintive cries; a small bird hops among the skeletons picking at tidbits while the hunters troop off with their bounty of food.

The second track may well be the soundtrack to a ritual during which a shaman travels through the Land of the Dead seeking ancient knowledge. Trumpet and droning voice entwine around each other as they pursue our hero who recedes further into the centre of the alien universe. Will he return? What will he find? Hard to say - perhaps we'll never know. Electric guitar on this track is plucked at times as if it were another percussion instrument and the electronic violin receives somewhat similar treatment.

On the third track, the electronic violin comes more to the fore and the trumpet retreats a little into the background; this is a beautiful and eerie piece which ends abruptly with someone thundering about on some sheet iron. All three tracks on this recording are so awesome to behold, it's hard to believe they were all done live and the quality of the sound, digitally mastered for this release, makes the music seem as though it was recorded only weeks ago instead of 30 years ago. Easy to see why this is one very essential album of seventies psychedelic music to have in your collection if you are inclined in that direction - so don't miss out or you might not get another chance for another 30 years!

JENNIFER HOR

Various Artists

Batofar Cherche Tokyo

FRANCE SONORE SON-17 CD (2001)

The Batofar club in Paris held a festival celebrating Japanese independent and experimental music in December 2001. This compilation CD, rather than merely being a historical sound document of that event, extends that celebration to embrace a range of artists in different genres of music (mostly dominated by electronic and DJ music) who represent at least two generations of Japanese musicians. At one end of the age range we have acts like Phnonpenh Model and The Saboten, some of whose members began their careers in music in the early 1980s or possibly even before then. One member of The Saboten, DJ Saguaro, has played with ex-members of Yellow Magic Orchestra and I believe another member, Hoppy Kamiyama, was born in 1961. At the other end we have Noriko Tujiko (born 1976) whose musical career seems to have taken off in 1999 when she bought her first synthesiser and sampler; she recorded her first album in 2000 and her second album (for Mego) in 2001. Between these extremes we have 10 other acts some of whom Sonore consider to be the best of their generation since they (Yuko Nexus6, Wono Satoru, Kangaroo Paw, The Saboten) also appear on the companion CD to Sonore book *Japanese Independent Music*.

Of the 13 tracks, the best include Thermo's 'Young Master' in which Kimijima of Gaji positively fractures Sudoh's drumming into an explosion of different percussion patterns and rhythms; Chika Shinohara's 'Mukae Toru Wa...' which sounds more like what most Westerners imagine traditional Japanese music to be and which amply demonstrates Shinohara's clear, controlled and precise singing and her perfect timing, unaccompanied by any instruments; Kangaroo Paw's 'Cat's Cradle' which is slightly queasy and threatens to veer off into psycho-chaotic territory (when KP head honcho Kohsuke Nakamura describes KP as 'shizo-music', I think he really means to say schizo-music!); and Wono Satoru's 'Tango No. 5' which really is tango music, except tango music was probably never so bouncy and cheeky! Special mention must be made of Phnonpenh Model's 'Speedo' due to the extreme vocal performance of Taniguchi complemented by the manic and dizzy music and an honourable mention goes to Satanicpornocultshop for the Band Name of the Year award and his amusing and seemingly purposeless piece which skitters all over the place.

I have to admit I wasn't much impressed with Noriko Tujiko's 'I Love You' and I know The Saboten's *I.K.U.* albumwell enough to say that 'Unmitigated Audacity' probably wasn't the best choice to represent that band.

Batofar Cherche Tokyo is a worthy album to have if you're looking for an entree into the Japanese independent music scene and don't know where to start because of the sheer overwhelming bulk of the scene; heck, it would take several lifetimes just to hear Merzbow's entire output and when that man is finally over and done with, a building the size of Mexico City would have to be built to house all his releases. Of course the novelty value of *Batofar ...* will eventually wear off as younger Japanese musicians eventually come to the fore but by then you'll be able to tell Toshimaru Nakamura apart from Nobukazu Takemura (say those names fast!) - even I still get those guys mixed up sometimes.

JENNIFER HOR

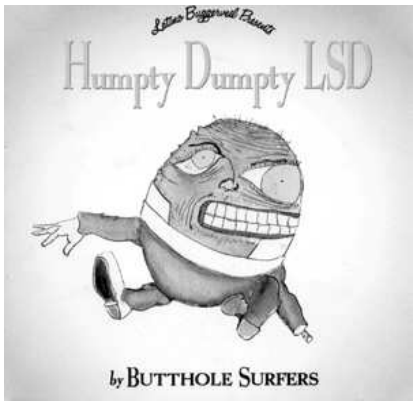
www.sonore.com

For more Japanese musicians, see the [Minimal Players] section

STRANGE NEWS
AND ABSURDIST UTTERANCES

When logic fails, let Dementia be your Paracelsus

Butthole Surfers
Humpty Dumpty LSD
USA LATINO BUGGER VEIL LBV07 CD (2002)



This is the only CD I've bought from a certain online music store, and they recently sent me a promotional email which began 'We know you like comedy...'

Yes, in the exciting and interconnected worlds of music criticism and shopper profiling that's a common response to the Butthole Surfers. Many if not most music journalists who refer to them maintain that the Buttholes were a bunch of immature beatnik jokers who disappeared up their own backsides in their desperate attempts to shock their audience. And with songs titles like 'Kuntz' and 'I Saw An X-Ray of a Girl Passing Gas' maybe they've got a point.

Well, no, as it happens. For whilst it's impossible to deny the band's scatological / adolescent side, this shouldn't blind anyone to the sheer brilliance of their music. Like their spiritual cartoon cousins (early Viz Comic, Beavis & Butthead and South Park), there's intelligence and imagination to be found if you dare dive beyond the smelly and obnoxious surface. No two ways about it, the Buttholes were one of the best bands of the 80s, a truly kick-ass psyche-rock act.

This long overdue compilation collects rarities and other material which didn't make it onto their official releases. And there's a lot of it - during their creative height they were tapped into a seemingly bottomless seam of crazy and hyperactive ideas which spilled over onto lots of collaborations and compilations. Most Butthole songs underwent a long gestation process, whereby they were sketched out in the studio, then honed for several years on stage, and finally either committed to a final studio version or else forgotten about by everyone except those with bootlegs or cherished memories of their legendary live gigs.

The band's classic configuration featured two drums, note-bending fuzz guitar, extremely heavy bass, and processed vocals spewing out either horror movie villain impersonations or hilarious stream of consciousness pseudo-stories. But this was frequently ditched whenever the band wanted to explore a new idea - check out their *Rembrandt Pussyhorse* or *Locust Abortion Technician* LPs to get a sense of just wide their range could be, encompassing genres as diverse as Hammer Horror organ soundtracks, speedcore, country'n'western, avant-garde piano recitals and heavy metal. Typical in its atypicality is 'Eindhoven Chicken Mask' (featured here), which places a Sonic Youth-style guitar riff under an archetypal eastern horn melody, a bold and funny combination that effortlessly pisses over the staid efforts of most self-professed multi-culturalists.

But admittedly many of the Buttholes' ideas have been taken to far wilder extremes in recent years by the Boredoms and other noise acts, so it's a surprise to find out that tracks like 'One Hundred Million People Dead' still stand up. It features vocalist Gibby Haynes' most intense use ever of the so-called Gibbytronix, a sort of souped-up delay pedal which captures speech and speeds up, loops, or otherwise processes it on the fly. Here it transforms Haynes into a gang of jabbering jackals, cackling gleefully at the unexplained tragedy referred to in the song's title.

There's a couple of unreleased tracks from the early days when the band were more straightforwardly punk. 'I Love You Peggy' starts off unexceptionally in an unexceptional PiL-style fashion but the ridiculous misogynyst-stoopid rants from the band's occasional vocal double act of Haynes and Paul Leary quickly give it an edge. We also get early versions of some Buttholes classics, including a prototype of their no-holds barred child abuse epic, 'Jimi'. It's fascinating to hear Paul Leary's sketches for what would end up (on the *Hairway to Stephen* LP) as an incredible guitar-mutates-into-dentist-drill solo that doubles for both protagonists (no kidding!) in the band's scariest and closest-to-the-bone track.

This kind of subject matter (and the Buttholes' apparently irreverent attitude to it) has put a lot of people off the band, but it needn't have. Whilst many artists like to wallow in misery and want us to 'feel their pain', the Buttholes see light in otherwise dark subjects and want to convey that to anyone listening. They're like the people who make jokes at a funeral - everyone tut tuts but is secretly glad that the mood has been lifted. The horror aspect of their music is cartoony and larger than life, and like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, they refresh otherwise hackneyed ideas by playing off the supernatural and the mundane ('You lie in the graveyard / You're rotting away / I talk to you daily / You've got nothing to say'). In its own way the Butthole's music carries the same goofy thrill and love of life as the most upbeat and infectious dance music.

Humpty Dumpty LSD is patchier than their best LPs - depending on my mood I can take or leave some of the murkier and formless numbers, such as the misconceived Daniel Johnston collaboration. But apart from that, even the later material featured here is surprisingly good. Surprising because somewhere in the early 1990s the Buttholes took a turn down a horrible MOR path, never yet to return.

But whilst there's no sign of a creative reawakening for the band, there's at least enough extant gems like 'Boiled Dove' and the popped-up version of 'American Woman' to justify a further compilation. And, thanks to Gibby and co, we now know why Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

Current 93 & Nurse With Wound
Bright Yellow Moon
UNITED KINGDOM UNITED DURTRO UDOR 8 CD (2001)

In August 2000 Current 93's David Tibet was rushed to hospital suffering from peritonitis. He was operated on that night and nearly died. Bright Yellow Moon is his public articulation of this life-threatening and presumably life-changing experience. Although Tibet and Nurse With Wound's Steven Stapleton are full members of each other's groups, and have also released two albums as Tibet & Stapleton, this is the first (and, one suspects,

the last) full collaboration between Current 93 and Nurse With Wound. The discographical accuracy is appropriate, since *Bright Yellow Moon* sounds like no previous release involving either party. It sounds, in fact, like a C93 & NWW album ought to sound, with Tibet's hallucinatory lyrical visions and Michael Cashmore's ominous threads of acoustic guitar swathed in the livid attack of Stapleton's hyperreal studio collages.

The album begins with a brief sung fragment, before opening out into the epic 'Disintegrate Blur 36 Page 03'. This vast dreamscape is both the record's creative apex and its clearest statement of intent. It depicts Tibet's fragile state as he drifts in and out of consciousness, pumped full of drugs and experiencing severe mental disorientation. The glacially shifting guitar and doomstruck percussion frame Tibet's debilitated attempts to come to terms with his condition: "The fault isn't mine, it was given to me in a red house, in a dead house…"

The next piece, 'Mothering Sunday (Legion Legion)', is quite simply one of the most terrifying things I've ever heard. In barely three minutes Stapleton piles horror upon unspeakable horror, tracing a confrontation with death when the dying man is not ready or willing to abandon life. Tibet writes in his sleevenotes, "I could already see helicopters chattering over me, and they followed me to the ward." They follow the listener too, swooping malevolently like those in Apocalypse Now and merging with insane laughter, sirens, marching, distant choirs and the crying of a baby. This is a vision of hell as disturbing in its way as anything imagined by Dante or Goya.

Stapleton and Tibet broaden the sonic palette on 'Nichts', acknowledging NWW's recent turn to rhythm with an infectious bass line and a delirious percussive attack. 'Die, Flip Or Go To India' is another long, spacey aural collage, with Tibet's nightmarishly treated vocal suggesting imminent collapse. The album ends softly with 'Walking Like Shadow', its sad text and gentle minor chords hinting at impermanence and recovery.

TS Eliot wrote: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." David Tibet came closer to ruin than most have, and Bright Yellow Moon is a moving collection of fragments attesting to his survival.

RICHARD REES JONES

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Davis Redford Triad

The Mystical Path of the Number Eighty Six

USA HOLY MOUNTAIN 8655-CD CD (2002)

Here are some uncanny and, in places, quite unsettling guitar-based workouts by Steven Wray Lobdell with his friends on drums, Theremin and electronics. This, their first LP, was originally issued in 1997 by Holy Mountain, and has now been remixed with some contemporary tracks, thought to have been lost or damaged, now restored. Guitarist Lobdell has played in recent incarnations of Faust (he worked on the 1999 *Ravvivando* CD, for example) but has also recorded not a few solo releases. Apparently, Lobdell had just been released from a mental institution at time of recording, and reports he was going through 'a great deal of psychic duress'. He was receiving ominous signs that all was not well, delusions similar to those suffered by schizophrenics, and was convinced he was being sent secret messages for his eyes only. He wound up in an institution in Yorba Linda.

Weird events also plagued the original recording of *Mystical Path*. Certain 'guitar glitches' occurred in the tapes, and a Theremin track went missing in playback. Lobdell took this stoically at the time; 'the spirit of discontinuity guided my performance', he said, turning potential mishaps into creative actions. Just before this reissue, he'd purchased a new tapedeck and found the master tapes for *Mystical Path* worked fine - and the missing track was restored. This 'definitive edition' is remixed the way it ought to be. Lobdell found the whole process 'very therapeutic for my tender psyche'.

No wonder. Although the track titles are very like Sun Ra with their hints at mysticism, numerology, Astrology, ancient myths and lost civilisations, the music here is clearly the product of a deranged mind. And I mean this to be taken as a good thing. It is very internalised, but the guitarist hath somehow unleashed powerful psychic energies with his bunches-of-five, through the simple conductors of strings, electricity and recording tape. 'Mysteries of Cydonia' starts with a sinister melody slithering through the underbrush like a black snake, and builds up gradually to a more hysterical pitch; the effect is harrowing. 'Smoke Signals in the Rain' is equally nerve-shredding. It starts with ominous, rumbling snowstorm effects with a gothic guitar jangling on the top; eventually you hear the guitarist getting slightly lost, swimming in echoplex and feedback. The two parts of 'Solar Aquarius' are mostly solo guitar joined occasionally by a shrieking Theremin; it's the cry of bewilderment over a piercing drone tone, and is strangely uncentred music. The title track is the most poignant of all, melancholy to the point of despair. The guitar wails over a throbbing loop rhythm, surrounded by acres of dissonant waves which correspond to the wayward shapes of the world's thoughts spinning around him. This is the sound of a man convinced of the rightness of his autistic, paranoiac-critical world view, and persuading us to accept his reality. But it is not voyeuristic to listen to this music; and unlike some much-vaunted 'outsider' art, this music does not fail to communicate, stumbling lost in a private world. If anything, it is frighteningly direct, speaking to the heart about the core of madness that lies within.

ED PINSENT 30/12/2002

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The No Neck Blues Band

Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones But Names Will Never Hurt Me

USA REVENANT RECORDS S@1 #50 CD (2001)

Indeed. If you thought you had NNCK all figured out and were expecting more of their beautiful shimmering abstract pieces that seem to go on forever and forever while crystal clouds of percussion rise ever upwards, you're bound to feel deflated by *Sticks and Stones* ... - not because the band has abandoned its previous style of music but because the music on this recording seems so insincere and falls short of what NNCK could have achieved. Cries of 'Sell-out!' and 'Wankers!' are sure to issue involuntarily from your throats and little silver discs will fly up from your outstretched hands (involuntarily also) and shatter on the ceiling. Even the artwork and packaging design are likely to infuriate with their pretentiousness. A wooden backing to the CD package with a plastic lid that has to be velcroed onto it? Big deal. Listing the titles of just three of the seven tracks? Who's being clever here? Am I supposed to laugh?

Actually the music (sort of a mixture of urban blues, American folk and tribal beats subjected to the improvisational approach) is not bad and there are good moments such as the second half of Track 3 'Assignment Subud' and most of Track 6 (untitled). However much of the time I have the impression that NNCK are mostly mucking about and indulging themselves. Track 4 'Back to the OMind (I'd Rather Not Go)' treats us to a finger-clicking session that supposedly evokes a tribal (I suppose Native American) get-together for story-telling and singing, complete with mumbled vocals, for ten minutes - I feel like an embarrassed tourist watching a lifeless ceremony put on for the benefit of tour packages. Nothing happens at the end which may be the point of the track but such cleverness may not go down with listeners. The rock-out boogie Track 7 (untitled) features singing that's rather like a self-conscious arty version of Lou Reed and which mercifully doesn't last long.

Overall I find this recording somewhat problematic: a lot of the music is good but there's a self-conscious clever attitude (which may have existed on previous NNCK recordings but was not so obvious then) and in such a context there's not much that seems natural and spontaneous. Sometimes it ain't necessarily good for the product if a band is having too good a time playing and improvising together. The music could have been really astounding if NNCK had put their collective mind and energy into

it (though NOT putting their collective mind and energy into all their recordings may be part of the game plan; if so, that's not likely to appeal to a lot of listeners), seeing as this music may be part of a new direction, or maybe not. As you can see from this review, I'm not against people doing what they like (even 'selling out' or 'wanking out' if they want, provided the music benefits) so I'm kind of in two minds about this CD; maybe if NNCK had done this CD with all guns blazing and with a 'fuck you we're doing this our way' attitude, I wouldn't have minded.

JENNIFER HOR

Noise Flamenco

London Boys

UNITED KINGDOM
TWOTHOUSANDAND 2++3
CD (2002)

Exceedingly enjoyable home recordings of two guys (Nishide Takehiro and Romuald Wadych) messing around with tape machines, toys, guitars, Bontempi organ, everyday objects and what they call once a week objects. Everything sounds like they made it up as they went along, finding sounds, developing them, losing them, multi-tracking them. Revealing a soundscape of infinite possibilities. Truly delightful.

ALASDAIR WILLIS

4 Old Castle Street, London E1 7NT, UK
www.twothousandand.com

Origami Arktika

Fantomlust

POLAND IGNIS DI 007 CD (2001)

This bunch of loonboons are a Norwegian collective who we may have mentioned in passing once or twice; their work is (I gather) highly prized by lovers of weird mystery drones, but I never heard them before. This release, a document of a live performance in a church in Poland in 2000, may be totally untypical of their music for all I know - but it's brilliant. It's realised entirely with acoustic instruments and nil amplification, using only the natural acoustical echo of the church building. Guitars, slide guitars, bass, zithers, percussion, bells, gongs, and bits of junk are all used; and some 'ceremonial' chanting, like a false Roman Catholic liturgy. The music is slow, stately, processional, even a little gothic - dark and eerie rumbly drone epics. The use of slide guitars is particularly inspired - they play them so slowly, and sustain high notes for so long, they make them sound like hummingbirds swimming in glue.

Photographs of the event confirm the very ritualistic aspect of their performance - far from 'rocking out', the combo look as solemn and unmoving as priests on the altar during a high mass, as they pluck their instruments, strike mannered poses and perform slow marches. It's almost as if the orchestra in *The Wicker Man* had gotten Christian religion instead of their demented pagan beliefs, but somehow still stayed 'weird'. Indeed, there are not a few folk-music elements in this music - I mean not just in the use of acoustic instruments, but in the slightly halting, homespun delivery of it.

The name of this collective project is Origami Republika, although I think they vary the naming scheme slightly for each release. The personnel hereon are Bjarne Larsen, Kjell Øyvind Braaten, Rune Flaten, Tore Honore Bøe and Kai S Mikalsen. Tore H Bøe recently had a fine solo release *Siesta*, an electronic CD of quiet miniatures. In all this is a spellbinding set of great instrumental mystery trance music, fit for serious dementoids all around the word.

ED PINSENT 08/12/2002

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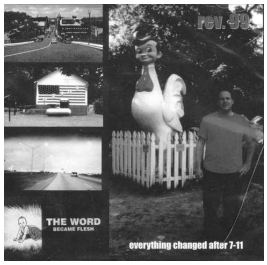
rev.99

Everything changed after 7-11

USA PAX RECORDINGS
PR90255 (CD)



Fearing the worst, I sipped gingerly at the steaming, bubbling goblet of this (to me) defiantly obscure hyperImprov-cum-collage. The pretension readings were spinning crazily into the red as the packaging and general vibe of the object dismayed my innocent hope for a lovely new record I could really enjoy. Failing that, I'd be happy with cheap, degrading assaults on all received notions of good taste. Certainly I'd no expectation of being concurrently moved, amused and abused as Rev 99 (collaborative body piloted by 99 Hooker, New York-based saxophonist, spoken word artist and filmmaker) entoileted me on a guided tour through the caustic bowels of ambient psychedelia circa 2002.

Like a fine rabies, the sense of disorientated, hallucinogenic mania in this music has peaks and troughs, frenzies and catatones; it will not leave us alone; it toys with us, using our vanity to undo us as we bite into our projections of coherence only to taste the cosmic reverse. But what sounds at first like incoherence and feels, moreover, as if an incontinence had invaded our constipated dreams, over time undresses the gauche Psyche and werewolves her rigorously, as Freud sodomises an ecstatic J-Lo on a flying carpet of altered-DNA soundworlds (some 'real', some 'virtual'). At the further reaches of the CD, where few 3D-intelligences are sufficiently porous to endure, it is rumoured Psyche can be spotted among the maenads, chasing Elvis-Dionysus into Vegas-Mordor....

You want a trainspotter's guide to this gnarly shit, ask someone who was there to label the pieces of hardware used or to spell out the why of it all. I gather there was some sort of terrorist incident in New York a couple of years ago, involving aeroplanes and tall buildings- you might remember? Yeah, well this has something to do with that. I know people had been making scabrous cut-ups and sampling consensus noises off the radio for ages prior to that, in much the same way as there have always been prophets of doom and apocalypse cultures (at least since the fall of Atlantis). But now the two trends have dovetailed beautifully in the capable hands of 99 Hooker and his homies, who add a glorious seething phosphorescence to the usual rat-infested *bricolage*. I commend them on what I perceive, with my limey ears, to be an efficacious invocation of Mercurius, that divine-diabolic hermaphrodite whose double sex governs the séance enacted herein, preventing it from straying into anguished machismo or strident New York queenliness (though this record is, in some undeniable way, reminiscent of Bette Midler).

I mean, it's not as if it's difficult to make a dull record which filters 'real-time inputs from sources such as video, field recordings, live improv and spoken word through post-production shaping and sculpting'. Indeed, as in much contemporary sound-art, the fetishising of means and method (extreme emphasis on 'how', little emphasis on 'why') which germinated in the Dadaist critique of media often amounts to little more than the commodified dotcom face of an ancient nihilism. How malevolently well-mannered, then, for Rev 99 to put these tools (born of the 'pre-apocalyptic consumer culture' to which *Everything Changed*... is conceived as a 'chaotic reaction') to such elegantly measured use, splitting the atom of difference between mastery and incompetence, ie right on the cutting edge of the new polyphony.

See you there.

JONATHAN HELLIER

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Reynols

Pacalirte Sorban Cumanos

USA BETA-LACTAM RING RECORDS MT051 CD (2002)

Argentinian art-punk trio Reynols surface on the American avant-blurpho label that's generating mucho buzz as I write, with their most 'produced' sounding record yet - this fat cockaroach boasts a fantastic 'surface', thrilling the ears with a bonanza of varied studio effects - so it's an extremely enjoyable coca-leaf fuelled listen. Reynols arrive at this point without losing one iota of the nervy edginess and rawness for which we know and love these abrasive goonoids. This encouraging result may be attributed to the Buenos Aires studio used to realise the work, unless they're entering a new 'crowd-pleaser' phase and leaving the days of garage-grunginess behind them. 'The production is the same that any other one', reports a Reynols spokesman. 'We record every week and every week and all comes from that, but yes it's true that we probably choosed some "powerful" tracks with "good sound quality" for this record.' Half Japanese, I seem to recall, took a turn towards 'better' production values on their records in the 1980s, and were largely unsuccessful artistically in their efforts, with the exception of collaborations with the hated Mark Kramer. Just goes to show you that 'good' production values do not always a strawberry shortcake make.

This Reynols CD - which is more like a chocolate layer cake than a normal record - seems to be a collection of pastiches, of extremely warped approaches to familiar rock idioms, such as heavy metal, soul music, psychedelic freakouts, acoustic folk songs (the beguiling 'Whons Disito 4 y 4'), torchy ballads and surf music. All of these are rendered deliciously 'wrong' in fine Reynols style of course, and turned into grotesque mis-shapes like rejected chocolates rolling off a conveyor belt. But rarely has the combination of the (slightly) familiar with the (completely) ugly seemed so effective, so addictive...like hearing fave platters from your record collection reflected in a distorting mirror, by circus freaks. There's even one ditty - the profoundly affecting 'Fincoll (que norar)' - which might just be a cover of 'Don't Cry for Me Argentina', with singer Tomasin bellowing out his phonetically-approximated groans in a faintly sarcastic tone, against a brilliant moody organ backdrop. Can such things be? They be! I asked Reynols about this, and they said: 'Is not strictly a "cover version" but yes, in a track it seems that Miguel starts singing that in his own way, but well it might be a cover of any other song too, the question is what is and what is not a cover when Miguel is singing? who knows what is what...'

What's next - a Reynols Abba tribute LP? This tasty release arrives in a sumptuous full-colour sleeve that delivers the full Reynols 'LSD trip' visual experience, as refracted through folk art..a naive, colourful Messiah-figure with yellow hair and a blue robe is adrift in an orange landscape, with a giant feather, floating church bells, a little fish, hieroglyphics and a bowl of maize...on the back cover, there's a weird Astral golem with a Bolas for a hand, menacingly prowling across an open road. Far freaking out, I'm sure - next stop the booby hatch! While many of the familiar Reynols 'musical' trademarks are here, this great set is performed with a new sense of conviction and - dare I say it - greater musical skill in the performances. The earlier releases win prizes for innovation and determination to wring musical interest from a very limited range of sounds, but now...well, they've become Fleetwood Mac overnight. And with the variety of utterly twisted rock pastiches on offer, the overall audience appeal is unmissable - I expect this might just be the record that will start to introduce Reynols to new listeners out there in record-buying land. But - if they ever turn up appearing on MTV, then I'm giving up with this magazine altogether and taking up gardening instead.

ED PINSENT 11/11/2002

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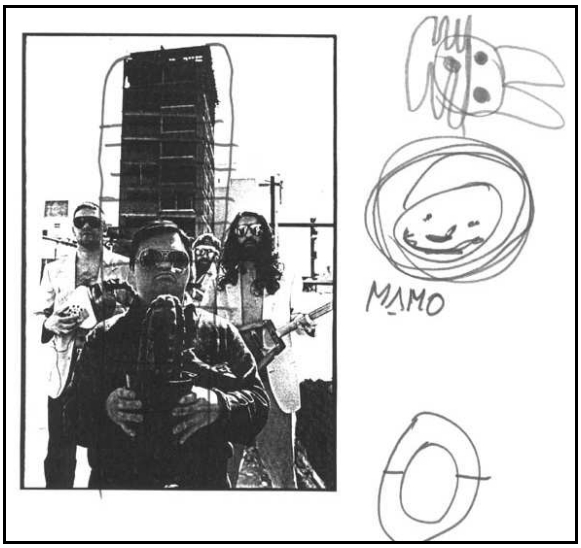
www.blrrecords.com

The Saboten

I.K.U.

FRANCE / ITALY SONORE / SNOWDONIA NO NUMBER CD (2001)

We here at TSP don't usually get the opportunity to review a soundtrack for a science fiction or a pornographic film, much less review one for a flick that's both SF and porn and which may actually take some time (oh let's say two or three years) to reach a cinema near you. So I have no idea what the movie *I.K.U.* may be like though as it's a Japanese production I'm pretty certain it'll have more computer-generated special effects than Merzbow and the Acid Mothers Temple people can put out recordings in a year and I note that the director is Taiwanese-born Shu Lea Cheang who was active in the New York independent movie / video scene for about 20 years and who has at least one other movie to her directorial credit, 'Fresh Kill'. For the movie buffs among you, *I.K.U.* takes its inspiration from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* which apart from its set



designs and some of the acting wasn't anything really special.

The soundtrack runs for about 70 minutes and that in itself possibly suggests the movie (74 minutes itself) may be somewhat like an extended pop video or a series of pop videos featuring the same characters (one of whom is played by a porn actress) though how much music is actually in the movie is another question. Anyway it's fun just to think about what the movie may be like. There are 23 tracks, none of which is very long. For an SF porn movie soundtrack, the music is surprisingly varied, pulling in not only the more electronically based music styles like techno as you'd expect but also elements from classical music (notably 'Zoo Motels' and 'Toilet on BACH' - that may be due to the presence of Hoppy Kamiyama in The Saboten of whom more shall be said later), traditional Japanese music (featured on a number of tracks including 'Sono di Passagio' which also has a rhythm that could have come from an old Godflesh release!), rock, jazz, African-influenced rhythms ('Zoo Motels' and happy Hoppy again) and ambient music; oh and we've even got opera singing ('Pink Tank #2'). A musically unified soundtrack we certainly don't have and the constant leap from one genre to another, often in the same track and happening all at once, is certain to leave listeners feeling they're being subjected to some humungous mindfuck (which The Saboten may have intended!) before they've even seen the movie which is sure to be even more of a mindfuck; one consolation is that as the music progresses, its pace slows down and it adopts a more serious and thoughtful air. The music is consistently good throughout as you'd expect from people whose musical experience stretches as far back as the early 1980s at least (one of the three guys in The Saboten apparently worked with Yellow Magic Orchestra), though I must confess I find the earlier half of the CD more energetic and enjoyable than the latter half which can be lethargic in spots; certainly the best tracks tend to be bunched up more towards the beginning of the recording.

If you don't care to see *I.K.U.* if and when it comes to a cinema near you, the soundtrack stands well enough on its own to be enjoyed in its own right. One of the guys in The Saboten we should keep an eye on at any rate is one Hoppy Kamiyama - no, not the one mentioned as having worked with YMO - who has an impressive musical pedigree anyway: he has written music for TV commercials, he has incorporated string quartets in a lot of his music and has played with John Zorn, Haco and Otomo Yoshihide among others ... plus he seems an amusing and eye-catching character with his penchant for dressing up in women's clothes sometimes ... definitely someone to watch.

JENNIFER HOR

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The Shadow Ring

"Lindus"

USA SWILL RADIO 021 VINYL LP (2001)

The 2001 LP release from the English trio of Darren Harris, Graham Lambkin and Tim Goss, with a little help from Howard Lester. As my interest in this combo has been growing, I've tracked down earlier releases such as their first LP *City Lights* (on Dry Leaf Discs, 1993). Their recent records continue to appear on the USA label Swill Radio, home of oppositional and marginal music. *Lindus* is a complete headscratcher. Collages of puzzling sound-effects link the songs, which are more like poetry recitals - featuring the solemn intoning voice of Darren Harris, matched with cracked, amateurish electronics. A lot of growling, heavy breathing and sobbing - even a baby crying, to signify the 'New born' on track of that title. Like many modern art movements since Dada and Surrealism, The Shadow Ring work hard to achieve the desired aim of undermining your 'normal' apprehension of things - linearity, space, order, and logic. You soon gain this very real sense of 'wrongness'; passing on this restless awareness is the first step in the master plan.

The poetry of Graham Lambkin is quite unique; able to confront painful and unpleasant things, and express deep ambiguities, and what's more it's very carefully constructed - which appeals to a lover of craft like myself. As you can tell from reading the lyric sheet provided, each text can stand as a poem in itself. Some exceptionally vile and horrific images lurk in these spiked lyrics, packed with obscure metaphors. 'Scratches' offers glimpses of a house invader in a dingy squat, a bogeyman living under the stairs, who 'leaves strange messages for you on bits of paper over the house'. 'We're Complex Piss' confounds images of urination, disease and sea-faring with the sorrows of a broken family home, the unexpected links, twists and turns of ideas rendered with impressive economy in the writing. 'I Lap It Up' continues the same theme of diseased and poisoned water, in a LP already full of images of rivers, rainwater and oceans.

These lyric themes and sounds meet in a moment of documentary recording on side two. It's Harris walking along the beach, with the sound of the ocean behind him, as he speaks a brief guided tour... he can see Folkestone harbour and in a flash of urgent paranoia complains that 'the security guard is giving me suspicious looks'. It's a key defining moment of *Lindus*, expressing the palpable sense of alienation and social insecurity that drives Shadow Ring's works, and firmly embedding this theme within the linking 'water' imagery. 'The Liquid Boys' has the densest, most impenetrable lyric on the record, and it's rendered with a slowed-down voice (much like on the LP *Poem for Voice and Tape*), to produce the most nightmarish track on *Lindus*. You can barely follow the text even when reading the lyric sheet, but the meaning is present...this will really get under your skin in the most horrific way.

Musically, the slow and doomy synth work and stern electronic noise is played with studied deliberate clumsiness and, like the entire LP, it's recorded with microphone placement that is an affront to 'good' production values. By this I don't mean that the sound is deliberately muffled or grungy, like an early Fall LP or a bootleg - rather it's too *clear*, much closer to the way we actually *hear* things than the way a polished Phil Collins-styled recording would like us to hear them. This strategy brings the music, lyrics and performance far too close for comfort. I surmise that it's the avowed aim of The Shadow Ring to invade your comfort zone, leaving you in a position where you have to make a choice - deal with this, or ignore it. But you cannot remain indifferent. In all, not a 'jolly' listen perhaps - but I find it uplifting that, in a world full of silly distractions and amusements, there are people prepared to carry on an unequal struggle like this.

ED PINSENT 23/11/2002

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Spear

Sapphire Flower

POLAND IGNIS DI 010 CD (2001)

A slice of genuinely evocative and strange music emerging like blue jam out of Poland's Ignis Projekt label. Here's a totally immersive dose of heavy purple-blue weirdness, so densely packed with rich instrumentation that it grabs you immediately with its thick sound which wraps snugly around you and sucks you down, like being plunged into a new and unfamiliar undersea world. Everything moves slowly and gracefully, suggesting stone angels flying in slow motion, speaking in whispers. A general soft-focus effect is achieved by muffling parts of the mix, causing a blended background of melded sound-painting so perfectly rendered that it scarcely seems to have been 'played' by musicians at all. Meanwhile there are other active noises, on the business end of the listening scale, which are sharp and keening tones, like unearthly wails from hungry beasts. Not bad soundtrack for the slow and doomy half-life that you feel descending upon you in old age.

This music thrives on creating cloudy scenes of indistinctness, particularly when it's bleeding out the fragments of lyric poetry - the closest you'll get to a song on this album. On 'No Difference' the extremely surrealist (or Kafka-like, for those that prefer a more intellectual comparison) recit is spat out by heavily modulated voices, at once delineating vague characters taking part in a confused scenario. Broken images create the necessary dream-like effect for this drama. All of these strategies of ambiguity can induce many mixed and unfamiliar emotions, and help you experience a strange nostalgia, triggering buried memories - or even implanting some false memories, which is yet more sinister.

A splendid deep blue cover adds to the 'Blue Velvet' sensations of this record, for those who are followers of that movie's brand of introverted psycho-weirdout. I can't find out anything much about Spear although the combo appears to be one person, perhaps the label boss behind Ignis Projekt. Producer / recordist / instrumentalist Bartek Kuzniak is also thanked, and Spear is joined by fellow electronicists Ultra Milkmaids (from France) on a few cuts. More than 'ordinary' electronica or slushy Ambient music however, this record strikes me as a serious attempt to realise a warped dark romantic vision, in full symphonic sound.

ED PINSENT 10/11/2002

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Ronnie Sundin

Morphei

SWEDEN HÄPNA H7 CD (2002)

Another splendid helping of weird minima-electronica from our Swedish man whose eccentric solo releases so enchanted and impressed me last issue. *Morphei* isn't quite as bizarre as I'd hoped after last year's batch of weirdness, but then it's absurd and silly to carp as it still rates extremely highly in the perplexo-stakes. I envisage *Morphei* as a small model doll's house, depicting a busy open-plan office staffed by a division of industrious ants - kind of a modern take on the old 19th century flea-circus, an institution long since outlawed, as indeed is any circus which features live animals. Cruelty to fellow living creatures is no longer acceptable in today's caring society. Very sensible ban - let's hope the legislators move onto computer salesmen and civil servants next...

However, an examination of Sundin's rough diagram in the centre-spread artwork here will make the proposition even clearer. The chart is a basic graph that I take to depict decibel levels. Two lines depict the fundamental divergent sounds used on the record. They go completely berserk in the middle of the chart when they reach a large rectangular graphic - without a doubt the centrepiece of the work - and they fill this area with a dense, cluttered noise. This block also has enough gravitational pull to suck in four clouds- or are they screwed-up pieces of

paper, which had early rough drafts of the plan written on them? In any case these clouds give light and space to the work. The only really puzzling part is the two squares further down the track, which also apparently serve as pointers to objects elsewhere in the mix - perhaps concealed sections of the music which I'm unable to access. At all events, it's a good report, even if it is hand-drawn.

Morphei is a great 'longform' composition of quiet, bubbling electronic music that builds and develops like a cloudy sky - or to be more precise, like bacterial growth on the skin of an apple. R Sundin has a refreshingly bizarre approach to handling this method of working and his released results are always unpredictable.

ED PINSENT 02/11/2002

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Various Artists

re: martin arnold 'alone, life wastes andy hardy'

USA APESTAARTJE NO NUMBER CD (2002)

CD comes with fragment (five frames) of film. My fragment is of Judy Garland. CD is full of glitches and over-processed samples like those shunted out by the Mego label. Fennesz provides the first track. I can't dislike these recordings but either the CD's quality steadily declines at it proceeds or my interest level wanes.

ALASDAIR WILLIS

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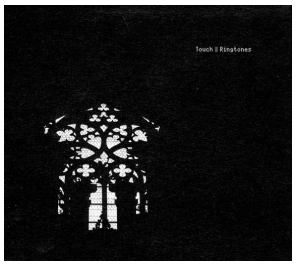

Various Artists

Touch Ringtones

UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TONE 14 CD (2002)

A concept disc consisting of possible ringtones for your mobile. Predictably hit and miss, fluctuating from lame voice samples to cute miniature compositions and including all manner of beeps and screeches. A bit too stop and start to just sit down and listen to, more like a box of Lego before play commences. I recommend shoving all the tracks into a computer and constructing something more interesting out of it.

ALASDAIR WILLIS

www.touch.demon.co.uk

The Vitamin B12

68 x 32 / System Six

UNITED KINGDOM RAFT 122 7" SINGLE (2002)

The A-side '68 x 32' is a totally bewildering madness, and that's a very good thing - could it be made from cut-ups of improvised records, spliced together with other foreign elements? Nobody knows but the creator of this meshugana mess. A highly disorienting muddle of micro-second edits and strangely isolated moments, which in form is almost as wayward and wacky as a Warner Brothers cartoon soundtrack, except the noises used are mostly dark and weird. The disjunctiveness of its mode - not unlike that of the Bladder Flask LP (see last issue) - makes a mockery of all the things you love and cherish, not just in music but in life generally - the world of mortgages, life insurance, petrol stations and furniture showrooms just seems completely pointless after only a few seconds' exposure to this record. Yet the artist is a gentle soul and not going for the jugular - it's done in a playful way, not violently.

'System Six', the flipside, is a more coherent statement than its sister's chaos, but no less exhilarating. Comprising lots of carefully selected and collaged xylophone samples, put together presumably in a systematic musical grid, it forms infinite patterns - patterns within patterns, floating on top of other patterns. An elaborate computer game that draws in the player through the TV screen. Again, a slightly 'wacky' vibe emerges, making you think the artist is sniggering with glee to himself, but it still generates confusion and uncertainty in the mind. Vitamin B12, who made the impressive ultra bedroom-cassette enterprise 4LP box set and a great double LP called *The Vitamin B12 2 LP Gatefold Set*, is a loopy genius, a mad scientist having fun with the world of possibilities within avant-music. As such, he is a perfect antidote to the more sober-faced progenitors in this area, and I think we need more like him.

ED PINSENT 23/11/2002

These Records, 112 Brook Drive, London SE11 4TQ, United Kingdom

Volvox

Bad Earth

AUSTRALIA DUAL PLOVER NO NUMBER CD (ND)

With this completely absurd release, Dual Plover makes another bid to live up to its reputation as the world's worst record label. Here be a clutch of silly, infantile noises and distorted voices, all arranged to deliver the most formless 'songs' imaginable. The singer emits farting and vomit noises from his mouth, and belches out huge chunks of spew-like anti-lyrics, over a backdrop of grotesquely naive electronica. This nauseating melange can be very appealing, make no mistake, but Volvox are jokers to a man - nothing serious about this work and that's a healthy thing too. The splendidly repulsive titles, such as 'Beetle Paste Dinner', 'Strange Eggs in even Stranger Containers', 'Same old lumps' and 'Sad Dog Food', all suggest decaying foodstuffs breathing their last in the twilight world of a vile devil's kitchen. And from titles like 'Infectious substances' and 'Insect Horror', there's the hint of the fear of contamination and diseases that will inflict the unlucky man who dares to consume these repellent comestibles. All this seems to connect nicely with the name of their previous full-length release, *The Damage Begins At The Mouth*. Perhaps, by extension, the entire world is rotten and diseased, in their view - but theirs is not the voice of God looking down at the corruption of His creation. Rather, Volvox is the voice of the worm gnawing within, the voice of the cockroach who has inherited the world from mankind after the nuclear holocaust, or the maggot eating the hamhock in the fridge.

In all, extremely incoherent and very badly executed music - resourcefully making a virtue out of every mistake, performers playing on their very palpable amateurishness, and exploiting the less than perfect circumstances of the recording. After completion, they had lots of fun splicing the results together into an indigestible mess to make this record - like concocting a horrific Irish stew out of rotting vegetables, snips and snails and puppy dogs tails. The voice of obsessive stinky nerds, getting in your face.

ED PINSENT 16/11/2002

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John Zorn

IAO: Music in Sacred Light

USA TZADIK TZ7338 CD (2002)

Zorn has a long history of compositions inspired by the work of other artists. The recent Songs From the Hermetic Theater was his attempt to convey a sonic response to the works of Joseph Beuys, Harry Smith and Maya Deren and in the past he's used the influence of Marcel Duchamp, Jean-Luc Godard and even Mickey Spillane to inspire musical pieces. This has not always been successful – some tracks have been little more than ammunition for the Zorn detractors who think his kind of avant-garde indulgences (balloons rubbed against guitar strings, performers barking like dogs, etc.) are a bad joke at the expense of people willing to stump up £15 for his CDs.

Having said that, for all his many failures it's a better world to live in where Zorn can perform these experiments. His own fervent belief in the avant-garde allows him the confidence to explore his most eccentric notions, knowing he will be buoyed along by the support for the 'downtown' scene of which he is such a key figure. Lower Manhattan is such a closed circuit that it remains impenetrable for the vast majority of music lovers who hear one squawk of Naked City or one blat of Cobra and run for the safety and comfort of The Beatles, but careful exploration for those who are curious reveals some very interesting things. Zorn is very much the product of his generation, bombarded by every aspect of popular culture, his mind reeling with the sum total of man's artistic output to date; how could you not expect him to come out with the massive range of material that he has? Someone so engaged in art is going to have their radar on all the time and have no choice but to respond to the signals coming in.

Some of those responses may sound totally batshit but they still stand as a valid reaction to the world as it seems to be right now. And, of course, such eclecticism will usually deliver the goods on occasion. The law of averages demands it. I've been critical of a lot of Zorn's output in the past - and I still stand by those judgements - but I have never been bored by Zorn, which is more than I can say for just about every other musical performer on Earth. So despite past disappointments I have always stuck with the man and followed his development over the years and it seems that in the past 18 months or so his muse has kicked into high gear and he's produced some of the best music of his career. Filmworks X: In The Mirror of Maya Deren showed an unexpectedly gentle side of Zorn, including some sublime piano work that contributes to his best all round film score to date, while last year's *Taboo & Exile* is almost a retrospective of Zorn's entire output to date, featuring a wildly divergent range of styles – from Klezmer to subdued ambient to surf thrash – that takes 'ritual' as its common theme. Similar in approach and overall tone is this new album – *IAO* – which takes its title from the Kabbalah that links the word to The Great Beast and 666. Combining the influences of Aleister Crowley and Kenneth Anger (to whom the album is dedicated) Zorn has composed a 'seven movement suite' that explores all aspects of magick, black & white and the shades in between. Many of the names involved will be familiar to Zorn enthusiasts – Cyro Baptista, Bill Laswell, Mike Patton – and all seem to be at the top of their game here. The mission here is to evoke a mood, to which they succeed admirably, as this would be the perfect soundtrack to a late night Halloween party, albeit not one for the greasepaint and black fishnet crowd. The tracks range from minimal and spookily ambient to ritualistic percussion to skewed exotica and all are performed with style and grace and a commitment to the composers vision. 'Lucifer Rising' is the real stand-out piece, an eerie female chorus that is underscored by the possessed whispering hiss of Jennifer Charles. It's immediately followed by a strange and exhilarating play on death metal with back-masked drums and vocals creating an almost dub variation on that most tired of rock clichés. Entitled 'Leviathan' it's clearly the point in the proceedings where the fear hits and there's no choice but to go with it, give in to it, and let the beast have you.

The overall collection exudes class and confidence and a respect for the audience. When I play it I'm continually engaged by its various moods and intrigued to explore just what aspects of Crowley and Anger's work inspired this music – which is surely what great art is all about – acting as a trigger for further exploration of the self?

As with all Tzadik releases I have to make special mention of the packaging which is so good that you have to wonder how this company (allegedly just 3 or 4 people, including Zorn, working from out of their apartments) manages to be so consistent. Tzadik clearly care about the whole aspect of their output and understand that their audience is wanting more than something to slap on at a dinner party.

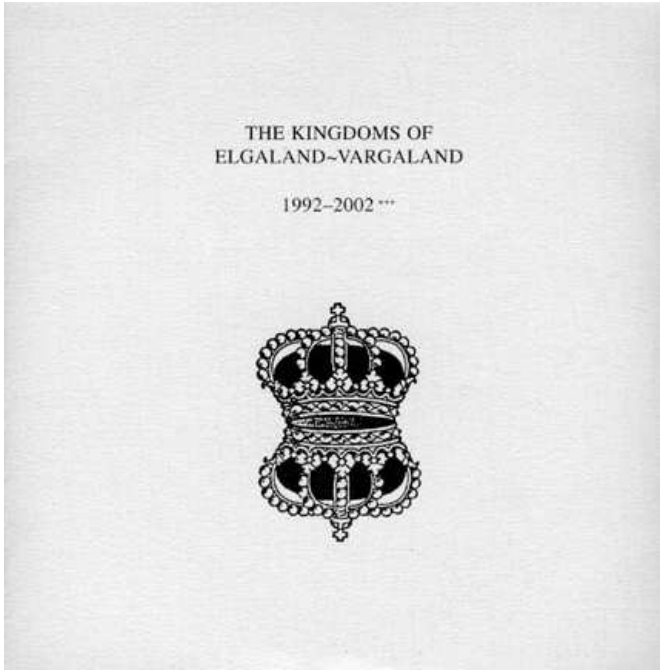
This is art of the highest calibre for which it's worth paying the extra premium.

RIK RAWLING
04/09/2002

www.tzadik.com

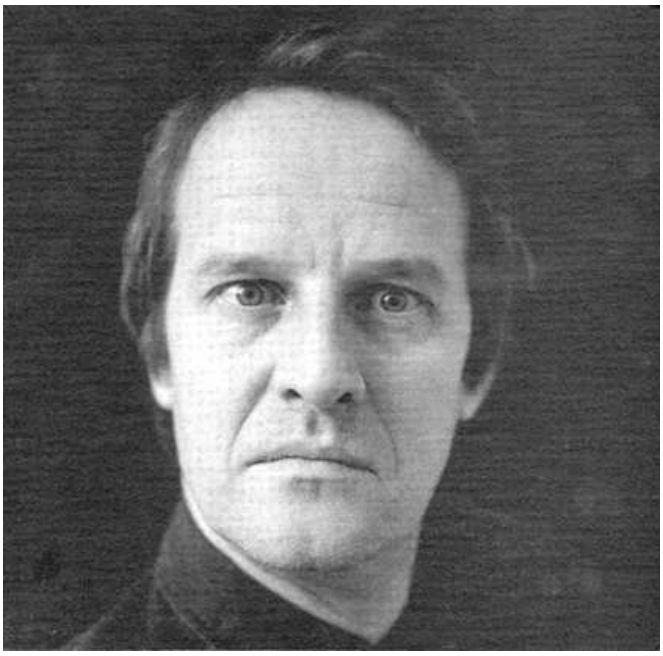
Various Artists
The Kingdoms of Elgaland-Vargaland 1992-2002+++
UNITED KINGDOM ASH INTERNATIONAL ASH 6.6 2 x CD (2002)

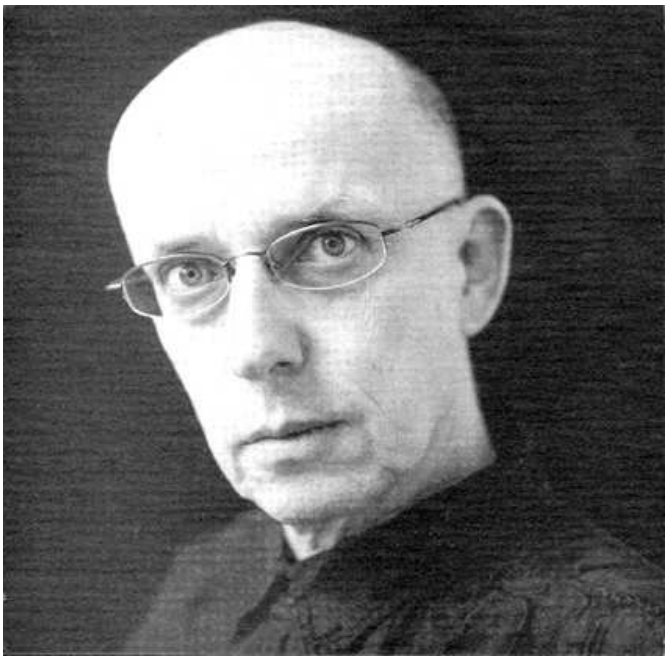
A double CD's worth of highly diverse peculiarity. Many Ash International and Touch related regulars contribute, as do many others (including not a few associated with the Stockholm electronic scene) to build a massive musical-sound monument to this vast conceptual absurdity. The KREV concept is a brilliant art prank started in 1992 by the Swedish artists Leif Elggren and Carl-Michael Von Hausswolff; the history of it is sketched in the liner notes here. At first, the prank may strike you as similar to Fluxus mailart and performance events of the 1960s, involving a tiny elite of friends and artists 'in the know' and generating a small blizzard of documentation that recorded their pointless actions and statements, which mostly meant very little to anyone else outside the charmed circle. The difference is that these two major European artists intend something far more inclusive - even you and I can join in - and there is a genuinely subversive political undercurrent to their dark satire. This double CD demonstrates the extent to which other like-minded creators have been persuaded to add favourably to the collective group-think mania of it all. The subtext, I suppose, of the KREV conceit, is an invocation to all creative thinkers to reject any ideas of 'normal' citizenship and sense of belonging to modern society, and that instead we should discover, invent and inhabit worlds of our own choosing. We can do this by turning the normal methods of the state against our enemy; and by cultivating rich interior worlds of imagination. This stance is not so far removed from that of the Dadaists and early Surrealists, many of whom chose to opt out of the commonsense world which - in the face of the absurd large-scale brutalities of World War one, for example - had demonstrably failed humanity on all accounts. Max Ernst: 'Dada...resulted from the absurdity, the whole immense *Schweinerei* of that imbecilic war. We young people came back from the war in a state of stupefaction, and our rage had to find expression somehow or other. This it did quite naturally through attacks on the foundations of the civilisation responsible for the war.'



The first four tracks alone will set the agenda for KREV nicely; 'The National Anthem' of this new imaginary world, we discover, is entirely flexible. It can be a piece of Marcus Davidson's digital piano jazz today, something else quite different tomorrow - or in even less than an hour. Shifting sands, like shifting political allegiances. It can be a violin tune by Olga Nane; a seven-second rattling noise by D J Guacamole; or an elaborate theremin and tape construct by Lary 7. All versions are equally 'valid'. Sten Hanson, with 'Citizen Sit Down', goes on to make a mockery of our national language by using cut-ups to make it into gibberish that will mean anything that is expedient today; at the same time he exposes the absurdity of officialdom's control of our actions, revealing civil servants to be chattering monkeys who bark inane commands and treat us like schoolchildren. Next, Andres Karperyd in 'Customers, Prospects, Partners and Competitors' posits a tradebase conducted by arrogant young businessmen high on cocaine; impossibly high-speed, technology-driven transactions occur in seconds. Then comes Thoms Liljenberg's 'March', an apocalyptic nightmare image of doom with a solemn voice describing a war-strewn wasteland. In only four tracks and 15 minutes, a neat portrait of the modern world...and that's just for openers.

Both Leif and Carl Michael, as founders of this kingdom, are paid musical tribute by their subjects. Leif Elggren has published not a few actions and recordings that return to his 'dying monarchy' theme, a bleak message that reminds us that our leaders are infirm, senile and insane; some tracks here pay homage to and expand on his works, in particular Mats Gustafson with his 'No More Coffee for King Leif'. Gustasfon's king is merely asleep, but no less ineffectual. Kent Tankred has performed with Leif as The Sons of God; his 'Information' is an ominous rumbling packed with dreadful secret data. Carl Michael, meanwhile, receives homage from Jim O'Rourke who reminisces about CM's original project in 'When I First Saw Phauss'; and from Rozenhall's 'Exile in KREV', which is a superb electronic horror recorded in Stockholm with a shuddering monotony worthy of CMVH's gallery installations.



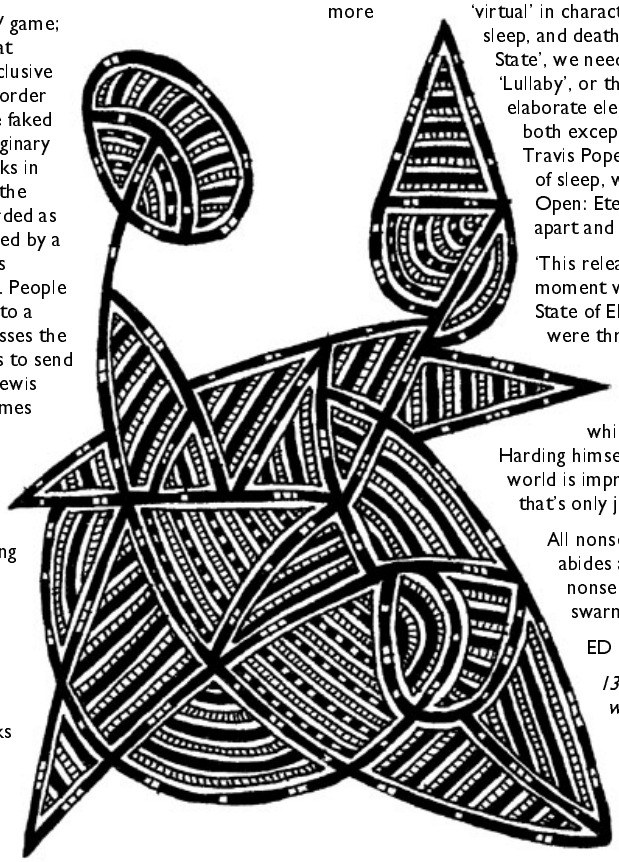


Mika Vanio records fridge motors and distant radio music, and speculates that 'There Is A Land Behind Every Fridge'. Other tracks similarly deal in imaginary territories and open them up, mapping the weird landscapes of these imaginary kingdoms. John Duncan's 'Territory' sees an interior filled with indoor traffic and mindless office workers. Thansis Chondros and Alexandra Katsiani walk along a stony path in Greece, and burst into a spontaneous theatrical dialogue; a real postcard from KREV, this. Chris Watson fetches back amazing documentary recordings from a 'real' world, Africa; but in this context his work cannot help but acquire strange new meanings. Cecilia Heisser shows an impossible scape with underwater birds singing - apparently derived from an old 1938 recording in NYC; while Adam Hayward laments the 'Impossibility of Silence' in the modern world, wallowing in the miseries of city noise, church bells, and mobile phones.

Other artists have chosen to play the KREV game; joining in the Alice-in-Wonderland rules that makes this KREV network such a fun, all-inclusive activity. Leif E writes to describe a tale of border violations and confiscation of passports, the faked passports that confer citizenship to the imaginary kingdoms and documents which are artworks in their own right. KREV believes in mischief, the possibility that actions like this can be regarded as performance art. GenKen Montgomery, aided by a recit from Luna, provides a few clues to this philosophy in 'A Holy Unproblematic Event'. People Like Us transforms the National Anthem into a wacky ditty, 'The National Humm' and stresses the playful side of the game. Ulf Bilting purports to send us a message in 'KREVMORSE'. Edvard G Lewis provides another key track in 'Queen Becomes Citizen...', a completely bonkers work of genius which debunks royalty with mock-solemn ceremonial intonations, against a crazed disco beat and mad noise. Oren Ambarchi, equally playful, sets a backwards guitar tape against children singing in his 'KREV Kids Celebration', a sarcastic vocal that's a total inversion of traditional UNICEF images of Third World children. Brilliant...

This set seems to be opening up a world of possibilities - I can't stop, the further I get into it the more there is to tell. A few tracks which deconstruct the idea of the body politic include B J Nilsen's 'State of Emergency' - which turns out not to be a paranoid noise, just layers of sinister radio mutterings. 'Citizen Sit Down' has already been mentioned above; Johannes Bergmark, with 'From The Coffin' shows us that even death provides no relief from state interference. So how about beyond the grave, religion? Sorry; KREV is dedicated to the abolition of religion, and puts the seal on it all with the very last cut, 'Religio Tollendum Est' credited to Pontifex Maximus. With its fake Latin, anti-papal artist credit and music which samples an organ chord, it's a neatly compressed attack on the Catholic Church as an institution; while the music, which simply stretches out the long church organ chord until it fades into nothingness, abolishes religion by a gradual merciless process of effacement.

KREV proposes to annexe and occupy two territories, physical and mental: the first, 'all border frontier areas between all countries on earth', and second 'mental and perceptive territories'. Accordingly, where the first disc is largely political and outward-facing, the second disc contains music that is more 'virtual' in character, preoccupied with human inner worlds, sleep, and death. For tracks which evoke the 'Hypnagogic State', we need look no further than Bruce Gilbert's 'Lullaby', or the glorious 'Schlaraffenland', a long and elaborate electronic construction by Jean-Louis Huhta; both exceptionally beautiful electronic works. Steven Travis Pope conversely provides the nightmarish side of sleep, with his four-track cut-up work 'Gates Still Open: Eternal Dream', with gibbering voices torn apart and unsettling, rushing synth noises.



'This release marks the tenth anniversary of the moment when, at 12 noon on 27th May 1992, the State of Elgaland-Vargaland was proclaimed...there were three anniversary celebrations marking the founding of the kingdom.' Now they boast 630 official citizens, and a host of Embassies, Consulates and Ministries (of which Ash International label boss MSC Harding himself is one). The depth of this imaginary world is impressive; I'm sure it's a process of population that's only just beginning.

All nonsense, you think? Nonsense has power, it abides and endures. W H Auden wrote this of nonsense writer Edward Lear: '...And children swarmed to him like settlers. He became a land.'

ED PINSENT 07/12/2002

13 Osward Road, London SW19 7SS, UK
www.ashinternational.com
For more information on the Kingdoms, visit: www.it.kth.se/KREV

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William Basinski

William Basinski has made a rather extraordinarily beautiful recording (reviewed in Tape Maschines) called *The Disintegration Loops*, the cover art for which features a striking and indeed heart-rending image of the twin towers burning against the Manhattan skyline. Here, he tells the story behind *The Disintegration Loops* and why he dresses as the dead Chatterton on the cover. Interview took place by e-mail 02 December 2002.

EP Impossible to ignore the theme of this record's cover art, and the fact that you listened to it while the twin towers were burning a mile away...Do you feel your music aids emotional release in this way? Can art really help in situations like this? How can it help?

WB There is definitely a resonance of sadness and melancholy in much of my music, which has helped me to grow in numerous ways, and I've had a wonderfully positive response from people all around the world who relate to this kind of music as well. Can art help in situations such as this? Absolutely. My friend, artist Makoto Fujimura lives in Tribeca, just a few blocks from the World Trade Center. His children attend school right down there, and all witnessed the destruction from their school. Mako was stuck in a subway train in a tunnel and when he came out the Towers were already gone. Miraculously the children and his wife were all safe, but had to run for their lives covered in that horrible ash and dust. They couldn't go home for 6 weeks, and yet Mako immediately opened up a part of his studio which is also in Tribeca, but farther north, as a gallery space for 6 months and called it Tribeca Temporary, with a mission to let artists deal with what they had experienced and to somehow sow seeds of restoration. He invited James Elaine and I to show our just completed film, *Variations*, in the first show last November. Everyone here that survived wanted to do something to help: some gave blood, some gave food, clothing, supplies, some dug, some cleaned...it was so wonderful to see the response of all of these people. By the time I recovered from my own shock and despair...the response was so overwhelming, there was no more need for sandwiches, socks, blood, anything...and in my head I heard...you are an artist...do your work. And I put in the video that I had been editing all summer, (*Variations*) and was pretty much finished with it except for one troubling little spot, and looked at it, and it had a whole new meaning, a new elegiac resonance that I hadn't seen, considered or ever expected before. The whole Tribeca Temporary project was an amazingly beautiful and positive spontaneous reaction to great horror and destruction. One small creative 'beauty cell', if you will, of many all over the world, which are our only hope for fighting the kind of desperate destruction these 'terror cells' perpetrate. We must encourage each other to come up with more creative solutions for all the world's problems, but it seems that the powers that be are bent on more

destruction, so that is very troubling, but we must continue to create in our own ways to offer hope that all is not lost. Elaine Scarry, in her book, *On Beauty and Being Just* extrapolates on how when one experiences beauty, one is inspired to try to emulate it, to perpetuate it. I had the pleasure of hearing her speak at a conference at NYU last month entitled, 'The Return of Beauty', that I was involved with. It was so refreshing for me, as a lover of beauty, to hear her debunk the deconstructionists' and post-modern academic theorists' bogus arguments against beauty.

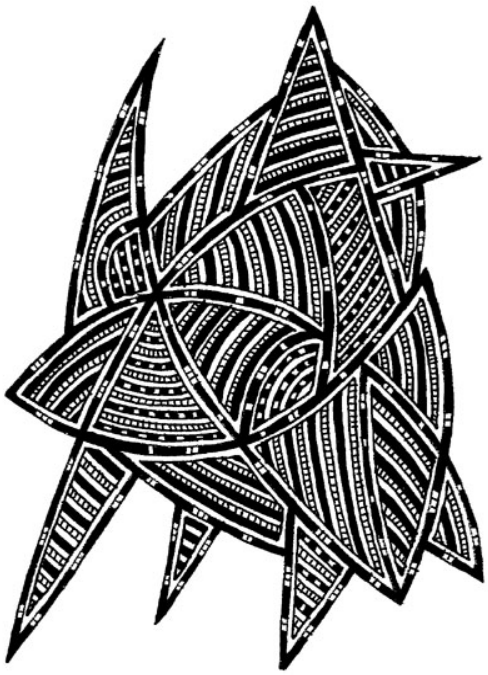
EP Have you had any reactions from listeners about connecting the record with 9/11? I know there have been some quite dubious musical and artistic statements about that event; yours seems very genuine, non-sensational, and private. But has anyone misunderstood it?

WB The reactions have been overwhelmingly positive. After David Keenan wrote that incredibly thoughtful and kind review in *The Wire*, I received emails from people all over the world wanting to buy the CD. They all sent replies telling me how much they loved the music and what it meant for them personally. It was very rewarding. One gentleman from Dresden was one of the first people to buy the record. a few weeks later the floods hit and I remembered him and sent him an email just to see if he was OK and sending love and support. (I received so many emails of support after 9/11.) I got the most amazing response from him telling me how he had gotten the CD just as the rains started and had listened to it over and over as the waters rose, and that though he had never been so terrified in his life and the waters came within a kilometer of his house and afterwards seeing the stinking mud covering the city and the fields and knowing they may not see green grass until next year, he felt that the music somehow went with this disaster and helped him to see the beauty in the experience. I was just blown away by that.

The image on the cover is a video still from footage I taped from the roof of the last hour of daylight on Sept. 11, as lower Manhattan burned. This footage was paired with 'Disintegration Loop 1.1' and became a video elegy of the same name which along with Variations premiered at the Rotterdam Film Festival last year and is going around the festival circuit. My friend the photographer, Charlotte Corday, turned me on to Chatterton in July 2001 when she asked if she could take a portrait of me as the dead Chatterton. We were both really happy with the way the pictures came out, and that one ended up on the back cover. I think it's pretty obvious by the liner notes that this connection was a personal way for me to deal with what I had experienced, and an elegiac offering from an artist in an attempt to offer some kind of condolence.

There was only one snotty review by some anonymous French journalist who said something to the effect that he didn't think it would be getting so much press if it wasn't for the 9/11 connection, like I was using the connection as some kind of sales pitch. It hurt me, but he didn't even get his facts right in the review, and it was obvious even though he was mean that he liked the music, so I guess he's just one of those people who goes around with a chip on his shoulder.

The process and what actually happened with the loops, and the beauty of the way it happened as I noted in the first paragraph



of the liner notes is what really fascinates people. There just so much in there that points towards redemption and decay and death as a natural and even beautiful part of the cycle of life.

EP Stylistically, this work of yours reminds me of Gavin Bryars' Jesus Blood Never Failed Me Yet, *or Holger Czukay's 'Boat Woman Song'...both used loops, but mainly both works are incredibly sad too. In fact they unleash emotions you don't realise you have. Why do you suppose this is?*

WB Last May a new friend who bought my CDs at a poetry event I hosted here, sent me copies of Bryars' *Sinking of the Titanic* and *Jesus' Blood*. I wasn't familiar with either, but was thrilled to get them both. Besides the sadness, there is such a soaring faith which sustains the works with great emotional depth. Regardless of one's religious beliefs, perhaps this touches a deep human will to survive even death, something we call hope. These are two of my new favorite works. I am unfamiliar with Holgar Czukay's work, but will look for it.

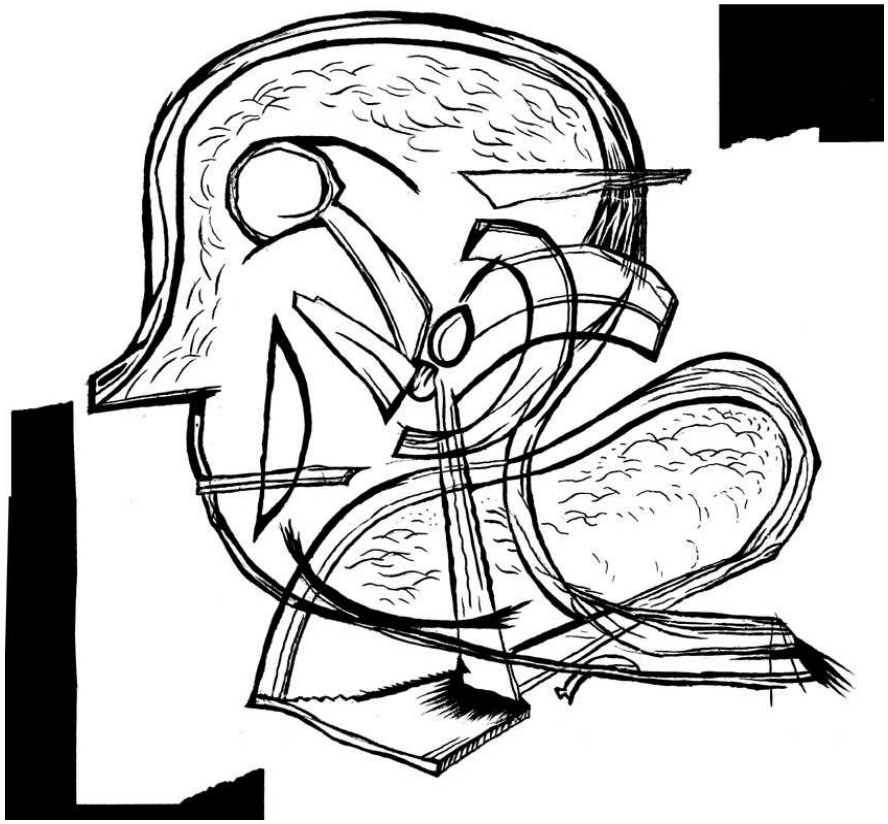
EP I'd love to know more about your other compositions. Is this release an atypical entry in your catalogue?

WB I just heard from the Raster-Noton office that *The River* will finally be released tomorrow, Dec. 3rd, as a 2 CD set. *The River* is a 90 minute meditation I recorded in 1983 which was the culmination of my shortwave music experiments. Originally recorded in real time on a 90 minute cassette, it was my attempt to portray the 'music of the spheres'. All of the sounds came from the airwaves. The loops contained one or two bars recorded randomly from muzak radio then slowed down a couple of speeds. These were then woven together live with a background of shortwave radio static, which would sometimes shift and bring in another bit of disconnected melody like a wisp of cigarette smoke floating across a room. Also, David Tibet will be releasing *Variations: a Movement in Chrome Primitive* on Durtro very soon: another 2CD set of my early loop and feedback loop studies with piano and tape from 1979-81...work I was doing prior to the shortwave stuff. Christoph Heeman is also releasing one of the first piano and tape pieces entitled, *A Red Score in Tile (L'Apocalyse des Animaux)* which is from 1979 and from a series I was doing entitled *Soundtracks for Paintings*...the title is from one of James Elaine's incredible paintings from that period.

The loops from *The Disintegration Loops*, which, by the way is a 4 CD series...(the other three are on the way)...came from this period, but they were so complete in themselves, that even though I loved them, I wasn't sure what I could do with them at the time. I knew they didn't need anything added, so I couldn't figure out how I could make them 'mine', so they got set aside for twenty some-odd years and through their own disintegration and my having to let go, they became mine. So it was through subtraction instead of addition that they became finished pieces. I had be willing to lose everything to have it given back to me in an even more amazing and beautifully glorified and graceful way. I've been seeing a lot of this in my life lately, and it is miraculous! □

MODERN COMPOSERS

"WITH ZITTERINGS OF FLIGHT RELEASED"



Misha Alperin

At Home

GERMANY ECM RECORDS ECM1768 CD (2002)

Albums like this sit very much at odds alongside my AC/DC and Zodiac Mindwarp collection, but they're all a part of this rich tapestry of life and each gesture on the part of these artists helps to enrich our 3 score & 10 so why be so self-conscious about it? Unfortunately I've always been nagged by the doubt that I should really be choosing one path to follow, rather than being constantly diverted along the way. I'd put it down to the need for some ecclesiastical symmetry - if I were a Catholic - but I don't have that luxury. I just can't help suspecting that I wouldn't have been led into so many time (and money) consuming cul-de-sacs had I trusted my instincts a little better along the way.

Still, you can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs and you don't get some wisdom until you fuck up a few times first. And thanks to the healthy second hand CD market in Bristol I don't have to hang onto my mistakes and misjudgements for too long.

Not that this album will suffer the same fate as so many other have before it. After enjoying 'Night' I fully expected to really like this one too, especially as it's just Alperin 'at home' with his piano. No accompaniment and no post-production, just the man, the keys and a tape recorder, playing on 10th February 1998, 21 years to the day since his father died. That latter fact will give you some idea of the over-riding tone – but it's not all doomed melancholy. Despite what the titles would imply ('Shadows', 'Halling', 'Nostalgia', 'The Wind') he does alternate between dark and light and clearly enjoys the chance to just 'sketch' his notes against the black canvas of night.

What I like most is the way he uses silence in the same way that Slayer use volume, and his pauses are as loaded as the shadow of a mountain. Motifs are repeated to great effect but nothing of this is monotone as he can't resist the unexpected flourish and extended epilogues that would work as pieces in their own right. You don't get much more minimal than just one guy with a piano (unless you get into Bernhard Günter's art pranks with variations on near-silence, not to mention Cage's idiotic '4:33') but there is nothing Spartan about this. Every note has its place and purpose and it's a testament to Alperin's confidence as an artist that he was willing to put this personal work out as an album in its own right, and whilst I wouldn't recommend it as a starting point for the curious, it is an album that's clear and hard like a diamond and yet as fragile as ice on a spiderweb melting in the sun and will please anyone who likes a bit of the soft stuff when they've had a hard day rockin' out.

RIK RAWLING 06/11/2002

www.ecmrecords.com

Alain Basso

Ab irato

FRANCE COLLECTIF ET COMPAGNIE C&C MG 01 CD [2002]

Eight formal synth, electro-acoustic and computer programming experiments from this French composer, a selection of his work from the 1980s and 1990s. It's all a good batch of avant nuttiness, some of it quite menacing even. For my money, I guess I prefer the 1980s materials, particularly the 1987 'Aérien' which was created on a beastly synth with 16 vicious oscillators, all spitting out venom and spite. It emanates evil and menace...and its 1986 counterpart 'AMX' is no less angry, fitful and troublesome. For some reason, I'm perversely drawn to those musical works with an underlying grim aspect, which I can enjoy with my ears while my eyes take morbid delight in regarding the cover art of an evil snake-woman haglike dwarf, clenching her teeth as her body dissolves in acid. Next stop Armageddon, Ma!

Likewise, 1997's 'Aberro' promises plenty apocalyptic frolics - a piece evoking 'a descent into the inferno'. Certainly, the groans and shrieks of the damned so familiar to us all are here, flailing among abstracted noises which suggest a long walk down a slippery steel stairway, but the pain factor is somewhat muted - it ends up more like a trip to the seaside. Need I also remark that I'm very taken with the concept of 1995's 'Araignée', where Basso attempts nothing less than the complete transformation of himself into a spider. Using a programme called GMX Tools, he 'obtained sonorities that illustrate the regression of the personality towards the condition of an insect'. Tasty - these agonising five minutes of noise provide an apt soundtrack for the listener as he contemplates his new, shiny, black metallic legs. Spiders aren't insects, of course, but that doesn't matter when you're undergoing a musical metamorphosis of this degree.

Added to which you have 'Aède' which, very coincidentally is derived from the sound of bells made in the Paccard Foundry - see elsewhere for what labelmates Eric La Casa and Slavek Kwi made of the exact same subject matter. Basso's approach renders a potentially calming sound into a roaring windstorm. Like 'AMX', most of his 1990s work achieves a curious condition of very carefully ordered chaos - as though the debris from a downtown explosion had landed into very neat piles of rubble and dust. I think this is due to his use of MIDI technology and computer-based editing suites for this period, which presumably offer a lot of control and can make the surface of the sound a little too smooth for me. But overall, it's a full-bodied broody collection whose slight edge of menace doesn't go amiss.

ED PINSENT 20/10/2002

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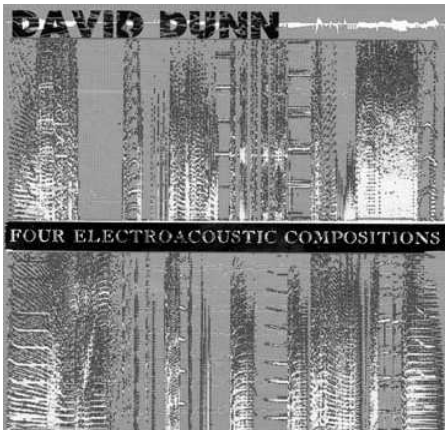
Tod Dockstader and James Reichert

Omniphony 1

UNITED KINGDOM RER MEGACORP RER TODD1 CD (2002)

An important reissue of an exceptionally unusual work of avant-garde composition. Omniphony I fuses the tape and electronic work of Tod Dockstader with the more traditional orchestra compositions of James Reichert, but in a totally innovative fashion which I don't think has been done before - or since. All the more remarkable when you consider the work was started in 1963, only reaching completion in 1967.

When people think of electronics with orchestra, what springs to mind is Edgard Varese and Deserts or Stockhausen's Kontakte. But both of these involved the orchestra playing live along with a pre-recorded tape of electronic music. Omniphony I adopted a different approach, where the two composers worked in parallel as a dual operation, to achieve a more seamless blending of tapework with orchestral composition. Dockstader kicked off the process in 1963, composing a set of tape pieces he called 'cells' - either derived from natural sound-making events such as bells, the wind, or the human voice; or pure electronic noises generated directly onto tape. It was then Reichert's task to learn these cells backwards - so he could begin to compose his orchestral parts that matched the 'sound intentions' of Dockstader's original works. It wasn't until 1966 - some three years later - that Owl Records would commission the recording of Reichert's orchestral parts. The jobbing musicians had a hell of a time doing it. 'The players worked hard and didn't complain, even though some of their parts were almost unplayable,' reports Dockstader, speaking in 2002.



The hard work didn't end there, as all the composed parts had to be further mutated at the Electronic Music Center in New York, using R A Moog processing equipment; studio techniques of compression, equalising or adjusting the harmonic ranges. They now had 100,000 feet of tape which had to be classified into four main groups before the final work could be mixed and edited. All along the line, the entire process seems to involve a detailed, intricate dove-tailing of two distinctly different working practices, allowing one to effect the other in a strong and important way. One's reminded of the early working method of Faust, where (using the custom effects boxes designed by their sound engineer), each player could simultaneously perform their parts and instantly mutate the sound of the others, in a live situation. But even a description of that acid-influenced weirdness doesn't come close to expressing the strength of Omniphony I. The work has tremendous drama and excitement - lurching from pure sci-fi soundtrack effects to Frank Zappa at his most Varese-like, dissonant brass and angry percussion tackling electronic sweeps and bloorts in the space of seconds. An extremely delicious concoction; recommended for those who like their modern music to sound totally nutsoid, although the rigour of the methods involved is far from lunatic in its approach. Also very appealing (and this will sound superficial) for those who like 'retro' analogue sounds and are interested to note how Dockstader evolved out of a commercial sound-engineering application for his work (including the Mr Magoo cartoon soundtracks for UPA studios). This CD also comes with two bonus Dockstader pieces, 'Study No 7' from 1961 and the excellent 'Past Prelude', a 1990 work which makes a collage out of Nazi Germany radio broadcasts; and if you think that's a cliche, you should simply catch a listen to this amazing work. Only slightly let down by the non-descript cover image, which although it features a nice archive photo of the two composers at work in the studio, renders their names almost invisible in blue typography. A small quibble though when faced with a work of this historic importance and great musical value.

ED PINSENT 26/12/2002

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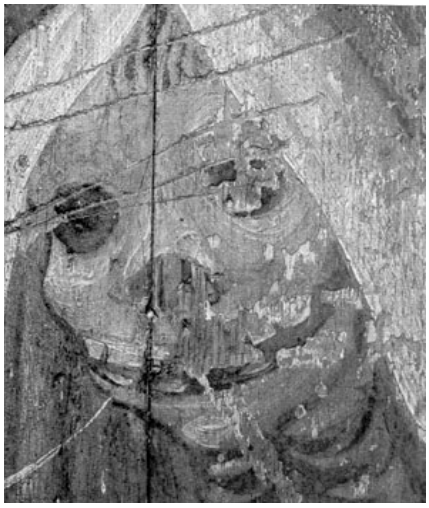
David Dunn

Four Electroacoustic Compositions

USA POGUS PRODUCTIONS P21026-2 CD (2002)

Four very good electro-acoustic works by this American player, one whose name is quite new to me, but it helps me to learn that he worked with two greats of the American modern scene - Harry Partch, the Californian-based composer, unconventional inventor and builder of strange and unique instruments, and Kenneth Gaburo, the renegade electronic musician. There's a double CD of Dunn's work on the CRI label, which also released much of Partch's catalogue. In common with both his mentors, Dunn shares that stale, old label of 'American Maverick' and wears the badge with pride, owning himself an eccentric, obstinate and fiercely independent player. He has a distinctive voice and a strong personality. His approach to electro-acoustic owes virtually nothing to the 'classic' French or German schools, or indeed current manifestations of said schools as reflected in the Empreintes Digitales catalogue. Your Robert Normandeaus may select narrative elements in an eclectic way, and plump for music that is as ponderous and baroque as a Wagnerian symphony,



all realised on an expensive suite of computer equipment that renders the music samey, sterile and boringly perfect, despite its impressive surface. David Dunn remains closely involved with the nuts and bolts of his hardware, using systems as his starting point, but proceeding to unexpected destinations. Since his computers can be unpredictable, his music sounds more dangerous. He tends to deny narrative content entirely, or at least resists the facile pasting-on of story-type elements after the work is finished; his preference is for high-density concepts, some of them quite difficult for dopes like me to grasp.

'...with zitterings of flight released' is based largely on the unpredictable behaviour patterns of an electronic beast known as the Vidium Mark II, a one-of-a-kind synthesiser built by Bill Hearn. Although Dunn works to a programme here, he clearly relishes the ways in which this ornery critter of a machine won't behave in an obedient manner; filled with that arrogant Western pioneer spirit, he resolves to break the back of an electronic bronco. Dunn claims this work will induce shamanistic flights, and he pays tribute both to the spirit of his teacher Kenneth Gaburo, and to the absurdist genius of James Joyce. This cut chatters in lunatic, stream of consciousness fashion. Conversely, 'Ennoia 2' from 1999 also uses an unpredictable system, the Wigout programme created by Arun Chandra; yet this configuration results in strange, sweet musical chords, something as curiously beautiful as if a ghostly church organ had learned to play itself. The computer programme of 'continuously changing waveforms' demonstrates something of Brian Eno's very sensible ideas about efficient computer composition, governed by simple rules which generate variety (rather than by lots of complex rules which require lots of maintenance, and lead to boring results).

David Dunn is not afraid of allowing a very human chaos to infiltrate his processes, as 1994's 'Wildflowers' makes clear. Here he throws off the veil of respectable academic composer (although he is qualified as such, with his teaching residency at Santa Fe's contemporary music programme) and belches out a ferocious noise that can hold its head up with much swill currently on release in the independent sectors. This track is also fun - deliberately rattling off a catalogue of quotations and playing 'name-that-sound' games, as he picks and chooses from the history of retro analogue electronic music. A knowing meta-music, a commentary on the history of the milieu he works in.

'Simulation 1: Sonic Mirror', from 1986, is the most intriguing and unfathomable work here. What's going on? I think it involves live processing of data, within an outdoor environment. Through this action, a form of imaginary sculpture is etched into the air, proposing a grand theme of an impossible Utopian state 'yet to be built'. The ultra-fast blurps and bleeps are like a Chick Corea ARP solo played at twice the speed, inside a reptile house. The impenetrable composition method seems to have involved taking a mountain range in California as source data, and remapping it back into another environment. A three-dimensional tracing, a rendering of huge scale into mathematics and back into sound? Whatever he's done, it's probably an impossible feat...

David Dunn makes good on this release, preparing himself with strong and unusual pre-planned ideas, translating them into robust structures and practical methods, and finding new voices in the electronic circuitry which he masters. He breeds herds of strange cattle, and unleashes a stampede into the world.

ED PINSENT 26/10/2002

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John Goto / Michael Young

Loss of Face: An exhibition by John Goto. Music by Michael Young
UNITED KINGDOM ARTISTS AND GALLERIES NZKH 104 CD (2002)

Very interesting music here to accompany an art exhibit by these guys, which appeared at Norwich Art Gallery in the UK in 2002, toured parts of the UK and at time of writing is on display at Tate Britain until March 2003. The project begins with Oxford-based artist John Goto collecting images from parish churches around Norfolk, Suffolk and South Devon - wall and ceiling paintings of saints. He was searching out examples of defacement and vandalism performed by iconoclasts during the dark days of the Reformation and the Civil War, when many a work of Christian art was ruined, smashed or defaced by self-righteous English puritans and Protestants. Photographer Goto reframed the faces of these saints - zooming right in on the damage with an extreme close-up - emphasising the gouging and scratching actions of the vandals, in order to express the 'individuality stripped of symbolic signs and meaning.' Examples of his work thoughtfully grace the booklet with this CD; these miniatures however do nothing to prepare you for the wall-size original art gallery versions. You could write an essay about these striking images alone.

Michael Young's music is totally in synch and sympathy with the above project. I don't think this was intended as a soundtrack to the exhibit (ie it wasn't played in the gallery), although it does use documentary recordings from the Norwich gallery exhibit along with other field recordings from churches in Norfolk and Oxon. Everything was treated and assembled in the computer, to produce a striking electro-acoustic suite, replete with sonic quotations fitting to the theme. 'Ludham bells' is a clever treatment of church bells; while 'Tuning (canon a 3)' features the Norwich cathedral organ tuning up and captures the echoey ambience. 'The sermon' is more narrative, the sound of an 'imaginary preacher' concocted out of a flute and some Phil Minton-styled yawping and bellowing. A distorted fragment of Palestrina's church music appears in 'Stabat Mater'. Besides the intelligence deployed in the programming of this short (23 min) suite, the sheer clarity of the audio is of a frighteningly good quality, placing the listener right in the middle of each documented event. This strategy works most tellingly on 'holy shit', a track which includes snatches of tapes from the September 11th attacks. The most nightmarish cut here, it rumbles with a low growling and heavily-processed bell-ringing, plus a distorted voice which is nothing short of a demonic shriek straight from the infernal bowels of Hades.

A very effective work which, through its juxtapositions in sound and image, attempts to explore the theme of 'sonic vandalism' as the creators term it. As you'll note from my opening paragraph here, I feel pretty strongly about the defacement of religious art (which was both misguided and unnecessary). However, I'm not sure where the creators position themselves. I don't perceive this work of theirs as a critical attack on organised religion; rather, a more non-specific and considered contemplation of manifestations of violence in the modern world, using religious icons and church imagery as a metaphor.

ED PINSENT 24/12/2002

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Jóhann Jóhannsson

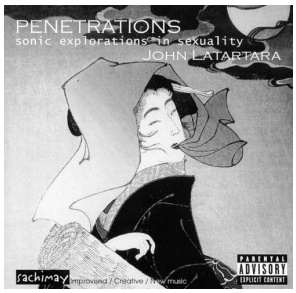
Englabörn

UNITED KINGDOM TOUCH TO:52 CD (2002)

I won't say this is a 'revelation', but it is very enjoyable modern and melodic semi-classical music which is sure to appeal to those who like Moondog, or Michael Nyman when he was (briefly) quite good. Jóhannson is one of the main men behind the Kitchen Motors music scene in Reykjavik - for more of his work, be sure to check out the excellent Motorlab compilations. This music was commissioned for a stage play, and has some restated themes. It is fundamentally rather melancholy music, despite some jaunty pieces, and has moving qualities similar to the film score work of fellow Icelander, Hilmar Orn Hilmarrson. A good one.

ED PINSENT 14/11/2002

www.touch.demon.co.uk



John Latartara

Penetrations: Sonic Explorations in Sexuality

USA SACHIMAY SCA 9354 CD (2002)

This is a unique and indeed very beautiful work from this American composer / sound-artist, who surfaced not long ago with the CD *With For Intoned* - a joint work with Khristian Weeks, where JL's groovy Tibetan bowl work was praised and affinities with Alvin Lucier were discerned. (See issue 8). Here we have an intriguing and serious-minded conceptual work which attempts to come to grips with human sexuality and its mysteries; and unlike some experimental artists who have used sexual imagery in a blatant way simply for its shock value, JL favours an oblique approach; he tiptoes around his subject stealthily, and refuses to draw any conclusions from all the questions he asks. Rather, he remains intrigued by the peculiarities of how we perceive the experience of sex. 'The subject matter, sexuality, has fascinated me since I was a child,' reports JL. 'I remember seeing pornography as a kid and the images seem almost violent. When I hit puberty they transformed into the erotic.'

Latartara captured various documentary recordings to use on the CD. 'I had already been doing field recordings for many years, mostly in NYC, and had recordings of pimps, prostitutes and girls in porno shops,' he says. He used these either as 'Interludes' or as part of long, abstract musical episodes. The 'Interludes' are mostly outspoken commentaries from men and women, frank descriptions of early sexual experimentation, stories about their first erection, that sorta thing. Some of them probe the 'idea' of sex, the process of how the human mind 'gains information' and turns sex into a game; asking questions about how and why we become sexually aroused. (The idea that the enjoyment of sex may simply be a 'construct' is, I think, a psychological observation that has precedents). Some of these confessionals veer towards 'psychobabble', but not enough to ruin your enjoyment.

Potentially more interesting are the longer documentary tapes which are interwoven with the music; 'Hitotose' is 'a real time aural documentation of an encounter with a prostitute'; a tape which may reveal more than you want to hear, as it follows the encounter from start to finish, unblinkingly capturing every nuance of the 'ritualistic' courtship that's taking place in and around the young couple's banal chatter. Meanwhile the music - scored for pianos, strings, and no less than three Tibetan bowls - is incredibly melancholy, painting the sexual encounter as a protracted and strangely joyless experience. Most tellingly in fact when the music pushes the voices to the background, as though what they're talking about doesn't even matter. 'Simone's Confession', which is 'a monologue expertly delivered by a Times Square sex worker', is a similar piece of eavesdropping and is about the most confrontational track here; in amongst the stream of pornographic detail, what mostly comes over is how bored this sex worker is by it all.

Two other tracks 'Touch Through' and 'Trust and Betrayal' are both solo guitar works by JL. The first is exceptionally lovely - guitar and harmonic feedback noise, soft gentle strums pitched against an intense humming power. The melded combination of hardness and softness in the sound contains undeniable erotic references. The second track likewise subtly emulates the physical motions of sexual activity, with a heaving and groaning effort in the sounds, plus a faint bubbling noise alluding to the healthy flow of bodily fluids. Interesting that both of these are realised with the guitar, an instrument whose history of sexual symbolism is pretty hard to deny.

You could listen to this record for the music alone ('Ripe' is a particularly beautiful piece, scored for flute, piano, cello and clarinet playing a meandering set of long drones in a Morton Feldman style), but the theme's undercurrents will stay with you for a long time. As a composer, Latartara has assembled this CD with enormous care, leaving enough space for the listener to contemplate the ideas he sets out and absorb them, all to the accompaniment of his moving music. It never deals with sex in a prurient way. True to its word, it is genuinely 'penetrating' and truly gets under your skin, guaranteeing you will return to this CD time and again to try and explore these mysteries further.

ED PINSENT 08/12/2002

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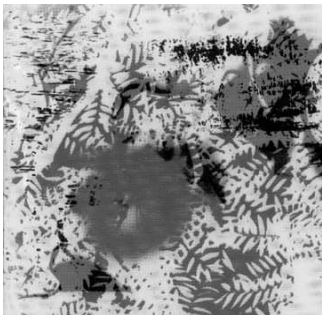
Quotes from Latartara are taken from an interview in *Chaotic Disorder* magazine 14, available from 15 Digby Close, Doddington Park, Lincoln, LN6 3PZ, UK. Price £2 / $4. bob@chaoticorder.freeserve.co.uk

Phill Niblock

YPGPN

USA XI RECORDS XI 121 2 x CD (2002)



Originally issued in 1995 as *A Young Person's Guide to Phill Niblock*, and reviewed some years ago in TSP 3rd, but here it be again with new title, booklet with some helpful notes, but the same cover art brothers. A pretty essential place to begin your investigation of this important composer, although the 2001 Touch CD *Touch Works, for Hurdy Gurdy and Voice* is highly recommended also. Seven longform pieces composed and recorded over many years, and performed entirely on acoustic instruments by very sympathetic and skilled musicians - there's the flute of Barbara Held, the saxophone of Ulrich Krieger, the trombones of James Fulkerson, Jon English and George Lewis, and even the didjeridu. Niblock's method is to build layers of these acoustic tones on tape, to form gigantic and richly resonating chords. In a way, the recording itself is the finished art, not the performance, nor even the idea. Despite this, Niblock prefers not to think of himself as a tape composer. He works to a score every time; and the score is worked until it's finished before the dubbing and overdubbing begins.

These huge blocks of sound require extremely loud volume for playback (if you can get it) and patient listening, but despite the mixed chords and complicated overtones and frequencies that result from the overdubbed acoustical layers, the work is never 'alarming' in the way that Tony Conrad's ferocious violin drones can be, attenuating your nervous system through sheer persistence; nor is there any spiritual implication as there is in the work of La Monte Young, Terry Riley or Charlemagne Palestine. One would have to look to Yoshi Wada, the Japanese composer and his gigantic bagpipes, to

find another musician who works so effectively with the amplification and magnification of the human breath. It's not unimportant that every work here uses wind instruments rather than electronic tones; the overdubbed tenor saxes on 'Ten Auras' sound like an accordion about the size of Fifth Avenue. In fact, with all this 'maximalism' going on in terms of volume, scale and content, it would probably be a mistake to even think of Niblock as a minimalist.

Niblock's work is extremely effective, and it has a physically demanding presence; the works just start and then stop, in the same way as a 50-foot long piece of wood painted jet black just lies there on the floor of the art gallery. Niblock's grand music interacts with the acoustics of the room, generates exciting ghost notes and rich overtones, and mesmerises audiences.

ED PINSENT 26/12/2002

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Roger Reynolds

all known all white

USA POGUS PRODUCTIONS P21025-2 CD (2002)

Three long tracks of reissued modern composed avant-complexity by American composer Reynolds. Mr Pogus so loved these works that he had to reissue them rescuing them from long out-of-print CRI vinyl editions. Well, Al Margolis has done the world another big favour. Broadly, this complicated but highly approachable music is packed with so many abstruse ideas about its development, its execution, its content and meaning that I'm unable to convey one iota of its richness, even were I to write for many more turgid paras. Reynolds - who has reprinted his original sleeve notes from the 1980s LP editions and enhanced his discursive thots with even more interpolations from his current vantage point - comes across as a singular, much-travelled and well-read person. From his journeys beyond the seas, he fetches back astonishing concepts about the physical universe, or new understandings of the metaphysical dimensions of human existence, to feed them into his elaborate compositions. Detailed explanations are set forth in the substantial booklet here. Much of his supra-intellectual abstraction is beyond my ken, but I would hope that a lot of it reaches you through the music - which is remarkable, powerful, and set forth with utter conviction.

On '...the serpent-snapping eye', three instruments - a trumpet, piano and percussion - are pitched against a four-channel pre-recorded tape of abstract sounds. In three roughly-defined stages, the musicians attempt to match the sounds of this tape, then respond to its vagaries, finally attempting to augment its charms; so it's a semi-improvised engagement with a pre-ordained entity, somewhat in the mode of Stockhausen. The finished effect (and this is a testament to the focussed skills of the players Edwin Harkins, Cecil Lytle and Daryl Pratt) is so seamless, it's uncanny. Of course, seamless is exactly what the composer didn't want. What he wants is confusion - a loss of orientation, induced by the pervasive presence of the tape, that forces the players to push themselves 'more deeply into the moment'. The title contains a literary allusion, a fragment describing just such a moment of disorientation, taken from everyone's favourite modernist fable of sea-faring lunacy, *Moby-Dick*. Reynolds may be living out his Captain Ahab complex. A 1984 recording of a 1978 composition.

Ping comes out of the composer's interest in music-theatre, or at any rate multi-media events - he wrote one called *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* in 1961-62 (not here). *Ping* appears to stem from the brain damage inflicted by the work of Samuel Beckett, the emperor of absurdist futility in text, drama, film and stage. If you ever saw *Ping* live it would be three separate events which are performed simultaneously but don't quite match up. On record, it's expressed as a sustained improvisation against live tape and electronic work. Reynolds himself plays the ivories for this recording, joined by Karen Reynolds on flute, Paul Chiharaon on percussion (the bowed cymbal work is particularly impressive) and harmonium, with Alan Johnson doing the live electronics. It's a murderous sound - a bleak, despairing, glum contemplation, very inward-looking - and breath-stoppingly beautiful to boot. It amounts to a perfect picture of futility, hard-etched in steel, with the precision of an utter obsessive. A 1968 composition recorded with the help of grant money.

Ping clearly got into Reynolds bloodstream: 'I value the mind's tendency to squirrel away bits of thought and impression which then murmur to the unconscious for years, sometimes, even decades, before finding their fated outlet in a musical context.' The murmuring continues with 1969's *Traces*, which is the companion piece to *Ping* and allows Yuji Takahashi to shine on solo piano, along with a flute, cello, ring modulator, signal generator and 6 channels of tapes. Sound events, and their residual traces, are both the content and the meaning of this work. This monster is about the most disjunctive of the three works, and sure to scare off anyone remotely opposed to 20th century composition. Not a segment of this scary music lasts for too long before it's given time to 'trail away' in order to allow 'the coexistence of several time frames and the resonances of memory' Phew. Another stony doomer, *Traces* is filled with conceptual phantoms - it suggests one half-formed idea piling up after another inside the befuddled brain of modern man, until the thinker is paralysed into inaction. Not that Reynolds is befuddled himself - he's simply depicting the human condition. On the contrary, the clarity of his thinking and precision of ideas is terrifying, almost inhuman.

Have dwelt at some length on these fascinating works, which I think will prove to be fairly significant - a revelation to me at least - and I may spend many years from now trying to decode them.

ED PINSENT 17/11/2002

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John Schott

Shuffle Play: Elegies for the Recording Angel

USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80548-2 CD (2000)

Quite an astonishing tour de force of contemporary music; Schott is an American whizz kid, relatively young (born 1966), who is so enthused and non-academic about his work that he's a real breath of fresh air in the field of contemporary composition. He loves records - records as artefacts, records as history - he knows his 'chops' when it comes to playing the guitar, and can likewise compose like a demon. He's assembled a brilliant small ensemble of talented clasico-jazz players, most of whom are reckoned as personal friends, and they tear into the music with the fervour and skill of any given John Zorn combo, or one of Rev Dwight Frizzell's big bands - only not quite as zany. He wants to blend in as many elements as possible. He thinks modern composers have ignored the possibilities afforded by the recording process; even great minds like Boulez or Ligeti still see the recording process as a straight-ahead document of a performance. 'For them recording is a photograph of a sculpture' writes Schott, 'a picture, as it were, of the art, not the art itself.' Conversely, popular music has embraced the record as an artefact - Schott thinks of Frank Sinatra's Capitol LPs, or The Beatles' *Abbey Road*, and other examples where the LP itself - as an example of highly produced studio sound - is the art.

Schott believes 'the world sounded different before recording'. Since records are such a commonplace now, and one of the main ways we experience music, it's hard for us to imagine quite what this means; but our forefathers had fresh, untainted ears. The earliest commercial recordings are, for Schott, filled with optimism and enthusiasm, and a delight and wonder in this new process that shines forth on every performance. He accordingly incorporates some amazing old recordings in this release, including historic cylinders and 78s from State archives and personal collections. His use of old records is sure to appeal to listeners who enjoy Philip Jeck, or Climax Golden Twins. Schott puts records together in musical assemblages, with additional scored compositions, in a series of 'Elegies' - all of which are deeply moving and evoke rich nostalgic feeling. 'Nearer My God to Thee' incorporates a 1906 recording of the song which fully backs up Schott's claim that old records

bring us 'the promise of unknown pleasures, the familiar made unfamiliar, a glimpse into another world'. Another track features the earliest known record ever produced (made by Edison in 1888) and which is apparently published here for the first time. It was captured at a Handel festival in Crystal Palace, and preserves - just - the sound of a 4,000 strong voice choir. What survives on this document is stunning; an ethereal, heavenly mass of voices, which an additional percussion sound created by the tonearm rattling against the distressed shellac. This is one of many happy accidents that can make old records so rewarding; I once attended a lecture by the film-maker Peter Kubelka, where he extolled the exact same virtues as they applied to old films. The ravages of time create amazing effects on old celluloid: fuzzing, fading, or peeling away pieces of decaying nitrate. These should be embraced as contributions to the visual experience, and not (as is often wrongly perceived) interference.

Schott also remakes one of these early records - an 1897 disc called 'Poor Mourner', an early example of African-American music about which little else is known. He remakes it and incorporates it into his dense and lively modernist compositions, a three-part exploration that excites and astonishes. Schott talks himself up well; a real polymath with strong ideas, and a wide-ranging application of his musical talents in broad-minded ways that only Americans seem to be capable of - for example, Gary Lucas, Henry Kaiser, Eugene Chadbourne - all guitarists who have gargantuan appetites for music and song in all its forms, and make electrifying combinations by refusing to acknowledge any barriers. It's interesting that in all his name-checking (and there is a lot of it in the sleeve notes), Schott never once cites Frank Zappa as an influence; yet he clearly owes Zappa an enormous debt. This record would have been unthinkable without, for example, *Uncle Meat*.

The cumulative effect of this record is quite remarkable - it comes close to achieving the same sort of kinetic, fast-moving trip through American musical styles and history as Van Dyke Parks' *Song Cycle*. To further enhance these disorienting qualities, the use of shuffle play (sic) on the CD player is advised. Schott is an extraordinary chap, very well informed, with a lot of love for humanity, for history, and for America.

ED PINSENT 07/12/2002

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Iannis Xenakis

Persepolis + Remixes Edition I

USA ASPHODEL LTD ASP2005 2 X CD (2002)

It's a curious if sad irony that Iannis Xenakis, who fought in the Greek resistance against the Nazi occupation of his country and then with communist-led forces against British troops supporting the unpopular and despotic Greek monarchy, which I understand also received US economic and military aid, during the 1946-9 Greek civil war (as a result of which Xenakis was compelled to flee to France in 1947), should have composed this major work and various others for another monarch the Shah of Iran who, backed also by the British and US governments, ruled his people as a dictator and sought to strengthen his power by 'secularising' and 'modernising' Iranian society. Among other things this conveniently meant trampling on Iran's Islamic institutions and values, thus weakening the influence and authority of Iranian religious leaders who in the 1940s or 50s supported the popularly elected Prime Minister Dr Musaddeq before he was hounded out of office by the Iranian Army, and who probably constituted the only really viable political opposition to the Shah during the 1970s. Perhaps Xenakis might have recognised the post-war parallels that existed between Greece and Iran when he wrote *Persepolis* (Greece at the time was under a brutal military government), perhaps he wasn't aware of them; now that he is dead, we shall never know what he thought, then and since. The fact is, *Persepolis* and some of his other works remain as a sort of embarrassment to Xenakis and his legacy, since a corrupt despot used this music as a tool to help rewrite Persian / Iranian history for his own self-serving purposes among other things, which is why the Asphodel label has attempted to 'rescue' this work from its original political context by inviting a number of avantgarde musicians across the globe to create remixes for this double set which also includes the original work in its entirety.

As you'd expect from Xenakis, *Persepolis* is an incredibly powerful work of musique concrète, very intense, screechy in parts and with rising and falling waves of sound. Listening to it on a CD player can only convey a fraction of the majesty and force of the work when it was originally performed at the ruins of Persepolis during the Shiraz arts festival held there in 1971. The ritual that was performed there (and which the music accompanied) must have been dramatic and bombastic to say the least, and probably not without a nauseating degree of kitsch as well. Fortunately the music doesn't convey any of the pretentiousness of the festival. For all I know, this music could just as easily be performed in a normal formal orchestral or other art / musical environment (maybe even one celebrating the downfall of the military government and the restoration of democracy in Greece in 1974 had such an opportunity arisen) as at Persepolis with only the name of the work needing to be changed. Ultimately, Xenakis's personal vision with regard to his music, the abstract nature of *Persepolis*, its ambition and intensity are its saving grace - the music itself transcends the original purpose that it was created for.

But however transcendent the music may be, it can't completely escape the political context of its birth which brings this review to the nine remixes on the second disc, each of which attempts to transform the work, or parts thereof, into something that eclipses politics. The star-studded cast of musicians try their damnedest - and yet the remixes never quite come anywhere near reaching the heights achieved by the sonic monolith. For starters, they're all too short, some ridiculously so: Francisco López's remix is only about ten minutes, for example. Secondly (and with due apologies to the artists), the musicians have not experienced what Xenakis experienced: forced exile, the isolation this might have involved and survivor guilt, all of which would have influenced his vision to some degree. So the remixes don't (can't) capture the original work's intensity and apocalyptic nature, though Lopez probably comes the closest. Probably each of the artists should've had a whole disc to himself for a remix, though I suppose a set of *Persepolis* remixes would be quite formidable on the budget alone, to say nothing of the impact it would have on the ears and whatever's between! Or if Asphodel were to decide on choosing one musician to do a remix, then on the evidence I've heard, López would be the best choice followed by the American duo Laminar. Still, you don't get many opportunities to hear Ryoji ikeda, Yoshihide Otomo, Merzbow, Zbigniew Karkowski, Francisco López and Xopher Davidson among others on the one disc so this double set serves as an excellent introduction to the work of these people if you don't know them; for all that the remixes don't achieve, the music is still good and Merzbow still sounds like Merzbow which is good in itself!

So what are we to make of the political contradictions in *Persepolis* itself? As noted earlier, the work almost eclipses its political context by rising to

the occasion for which it was composed and going far, far beyond that, though it retains its earthly bond. We could be consoled by the fact that when an author releases his/her work into the public domain, the work escapes the author's control and interpretation and it's possible that at some time in the future *Persepolis* may be used in a context that benefits people and promotes democracy. (Then again, *Persepolis* could be the focus of a law suit in the same way Judas Priest's cover of a song by Spooky Tooth was.) We could thank our lucky stars that Xenakis only wrote music for the Shah of Iran and did not appear to align himself too closely with him in the way the odious U2 man Bono seems to be aligning himself with US President George W Bush or the way Mother Teresa aligned herself with the Duvalier family of Haiti. Worse things could have happened.

JENNIFER HOR

www.asphodel.com

Evan Ziporyn
Gamelan Galak Tika

USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80565-2 CD (2000)

Gamelan can be shockingly difficult for Western ears to come to terms with- I've made a hard man cry before now with my fundamentalist attitude to such things and all-round lack of empathy for others- you'd think my Javanese bootleg tapes were jammed in the cassette-tray some days, revolving continually, pumping out the atonal din of a full-on gamelan workout, aaahhhh there's nothing quite like it. Cures a hangover pretty sharpish, I can tell you.

Of course gamelan, when placed correctly in the context of Indonesian culture, exists within the ancient and endlessly rich musical, social, narrative and ritualistic traditions that continue to vivify the lives of Javanese and Balinese people. Being a good European, I've never attempted to understand any of this, preferring the tried-and-tested colonialist approach: smash-and-grab raids. Like Lord Elgin ripping the friezes from the walls of the Parthenon, I like to recontextualise the fruits of other cultures against my own backdrop of post-industrial neurotic angst. 'What a fucking racket!' I exclaim complacently as I caper across its brittle surfaces. 'And they wear masks, like Slipknot.' But wait- here comes Evan Ziporyn, his community-music gamelan group known as Galak Tika (old Javanese for 'intense togetherness') and a bunch of hairies with electric guitars. Fwoooaar! American composer / conductor / art-dude with twenty-year immersion in Indonesian musics puts together transnational modern gamelan orchestra to play specially commissioned pieces, with rock to go! This is shaping up to be really foxy....

The CD is in two halves: two compositions, 'Amok!' and 'Tire Fire', the latter featuring guitars, bass and keyboard, the former embellished only with the quietly-virtuosic double-bass tremors of Robert Black. On the first few listens I was mildly disappointed to find that the music is far subtler than the H.P. Lovecraft-on-DMT war-zone that my inner teenager had been gagging for. Divebombing guitars? No sir. Tumescent fuzz-bass rearing up like a lust-maddened brontosaurus? Try next door. No second-hand Ash Ra Tempel licks *here*, which in one way is a damn shame, since gamelan and space-rock are both conducive to exploring velocity and thrust- the combination could've been immense. But what *does* reveal itself is a fragrance and a measured, alien logic that are themselves compelling and queerly beautiful. 'Amok!' employs a sampler to create a physically-impossible fantasy gamelan, or in the words of the author, '(to) eat up the whole gamelan and spit it out again'. Nice bulimic metaphor, Evan, and I enjoy the concept of sampler-as-stomach (although I'd be especially interested to see what colour shit the sampler could deliver if it were encouraged to fully digest its metallophonic meal). Resonant chords easing out of the low-end add gorgeous colour to cymbal splashes, in an atmosphere of hushed wonderment- we're lost in the forest, wandering in circles, astonished at labial flowers and the obscene sumptuousness of hairy melons. As the piece picks up speed and complexity, the 'rock' tropes come to the fore in breakneck prog riffs which alternate with more reflective interludes. What's astonishing is the variety of gamelan tones- its bell-like language is sophisticated and capable of many rhetorical modes. Dementedly rhythmic, the chimes challenge us to embrace new paradigms and not to glibly split mind from body, melody from beat.

'Tire Fire' adds extra Western instrumentation- the group really begins to ripple its muscles and strut. A full-on shamanic voyage is in order- building from eerie chord-progressions laced with shivers of gamelan through a phase of naked laughing idiocy which resolves into stunningly pellucid Buddha-wheels, unforms of great power and not-thereness. I really like the way in which Ziporyn and his group refrain from easy transcendentalist riffs or Chinese-takeaway special effects: we're left in no doubt that each theophany has its paranoid aspect- the restless, chattering gongs see to that! They're interchangeable with the guitar in harmonic terms- by intertwining these two the composer creates an organic flow which never topples into bedroom farce, retaining its formality and hence, its power.

Now if only some visionary would hook up the gamelan orchestra to a bank of distortion boxes and vocoders...and feed LSD to some chimps...

JONATHAN HELLIER

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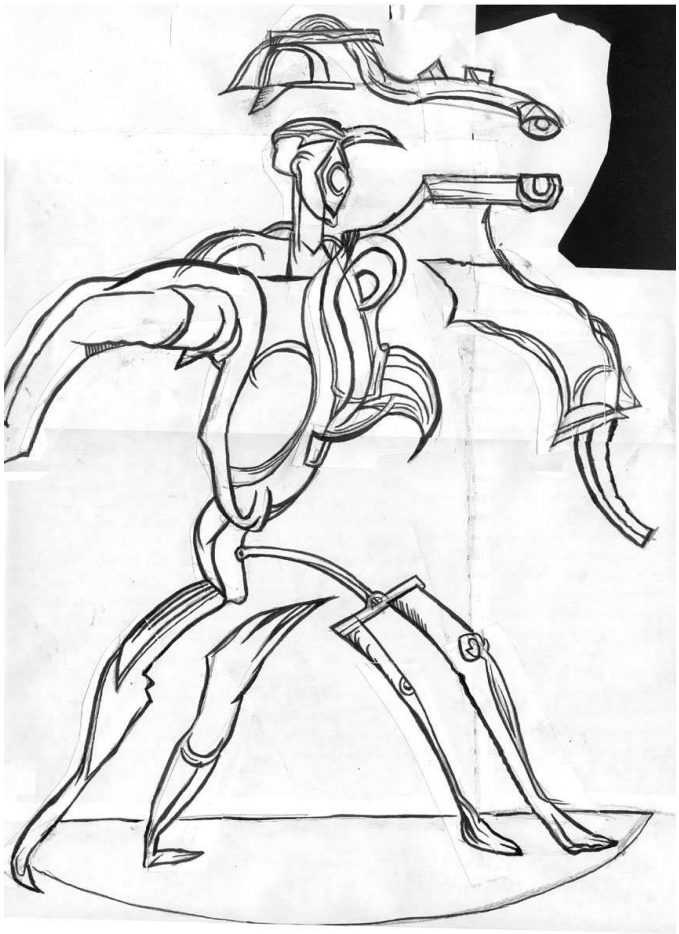
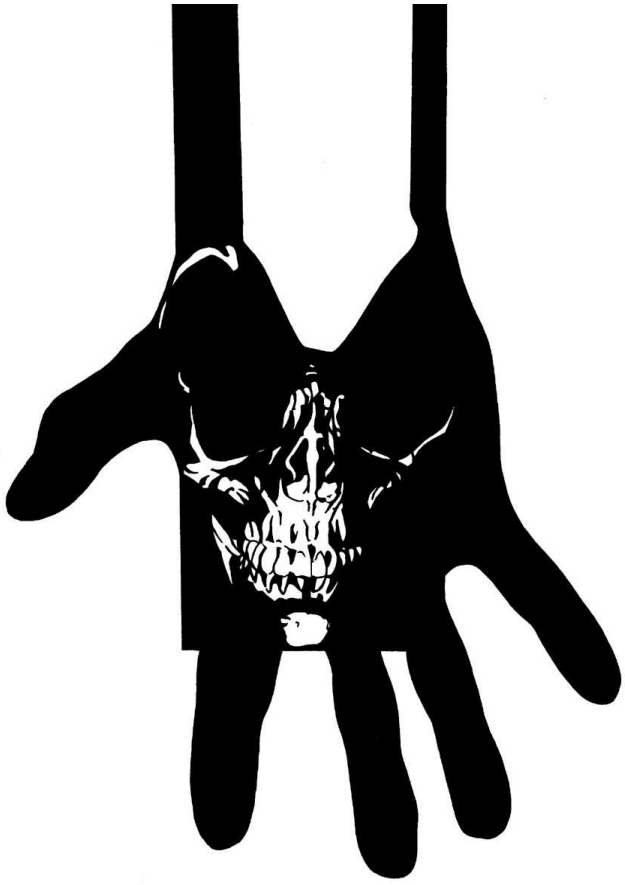


The presence of a *solid* body

GUITAR MUSIC BY GUITAR MYSTICS



Nels Cline Trio
Hold it Under a Faucet
USA ECSTATIC YOD / ASS RUN
E#55/FYPS11 JAAR 3 7" VINYL EP
(2002)

An ace EP of crazy guitar music and finely-judged guitar noise. On these four studio cuts of wild and hairy guitar improv, loopy axeman Nels Cline is joined by Bob Mair on the bass and second guitar, plus drummer Michael Prevssner. Never heard this bunch afore, but they have some guts. Of their musical statements on offer, the title cut is the most easily impressive in a facile kinda way and sure to appeal to fans of Sonic Youth circa 1986 - the guitar is drenched with edible chunks of feedback and wah-wah, and the whole thing clangs and clatters along like a hospital trolley at top speed. The rhythm section are pretty much led by the nose like stubbon mules up a steep mountain path, very much attuned to keeping with the crazy changes demanded by their leader Cline, yet never once does the engine run out of horsepower sufficient to maintain this high-energy drive. The remaining tracks are decidedly quirkier and meander around like feathered fish inside a sackload of stale parsnips; that's how 'out of place' this music is. 'Kaboo' uses, I think, backwards tapes to provide a solid foundation, only to have it ripped apart by yawping interjections of coarse guitar noise. 'Friends of Mine / Hose Beast' is a brief two-parter workout which begins with uncertain scratching and chiming effects, like a bat trapped in its own belfry, then sidetracks into some bizarre strangulated neck-wringing and slide guitar madness. The band commence to rockin' out again on 'Hair Hang (for Thurston Moore)' and pile on the hammered-strings gestures as though picking your nose in public had just been outlawed, but then there's a perplexing dead-stop in the middle - as if they have to prove to themselves that they too can do the weird-dynamics thing. This EP dates from late 1995 when it was recorded in a Los Angeles studio, and has been mouldering in the Ecstatic Yod

vaults for many a long year; so long in fact that The Nels Cline trio no longer exists, although its individual members are still active - Nels Cline very much so it seems. A good one.

ED PINSENT 30/12/2002

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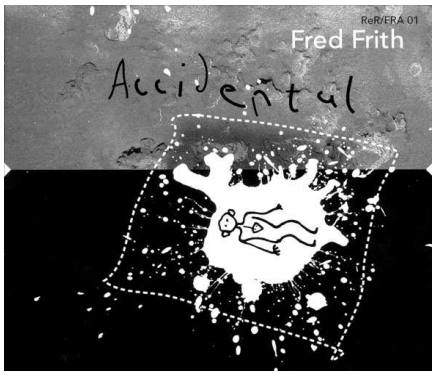

Fred Frith
Accidental
UNITED KINGDOM RER MEGACORP RER/FRA 01 CD (2001)

Another studio concoction from the grand meta-musician Fred Frith, this one realised over the winter of 1995-96 in a Stuttgart studio. Hard to credit that this disjointed, constantly-mutating music was commissioned for a dance piece; Paul Selwyn Norton wanted it for his Rogue Tool dance, which was premiered in Tel Aviv soon after Frith completed his work. Judging by the bizarre nature of this tortured suite, those dancers' bodies must presumably be tied up into the shape of pretzels by now, as they lie there recovering in an orthopaedic hospital in Lebanon. This is a fascinating, gloomy and troubling array of weird instrumental guitar music, with additional electronic and sampler treatments. It sweeps with an exceptionally broad yard-brush through the outer reaches of the musician's imagination, investigating musical planes unknown to many of us; few other players would dare to even venture where Frith walks with utter confidence, like a juggler walking a tightrope across Victoria Falls. A true pioneer he be, and yet he consistently dodges those proverbial arrows in his back.

Largely disjunctive, harsh and dissonant listening - 'Their Blood is Black and Yellow' verges on the unlistenable with its grinding nasty power chords - the set is also capable of moments of wistful beauty, such as 'Fooled Again'. Then you get cuts like 'Incoming', a controlled chaos explosion of guitar notes, samples and noises, than combines unbearable ugliness with the sweetest music imaginable. Far from an easy listen, yet the collection compels; a few spins later you'll soon learn to enjoy the bumpy ride.

ED PINSENT 23/12/2002

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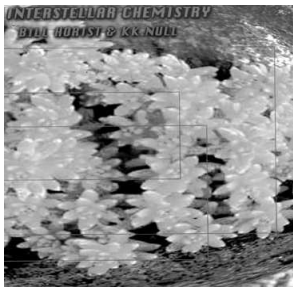
Bill Horist and K K Null
Interstellar Chemistry
USA BETA-LACTAM RING RECORDS MT037 CD (2002)



Startling and astonishing work here on the fairly new and perhaps quite trendy Oregon label Beta-Lactam Ring Records. K K Null, the Finn MacCool of guitar noise, is a savage Japanese axe-merchant and electronic wizard of horrors with a scary back catalogue that could stretch from here to Osaka; Horist is unknown to me, but it seems he had an avant rock-band career in Michigan before he settled in Seattle where he's since become a notable improviser and collaborator. On this psychedelic emetic, they both wield guitars in highly surprising ways, while Horist adds tape loops to the mix and his Japanese companion feeds in distorted beats from a drum-machine. The 12 resulting tracks have all the relentless energy we associate with Null, and thankfully very little of his customary high repellent-factor. Perhaps Horist has lent a more altruistic sheen to the project, sanding off the abrasive distortions and blocking the aggressive body-blows.

As stated, 'Gog and Magog' here wrench a distinctive sound from their axes not often heard on record - and with little reliance on studio effect. The loops and drum patterns are quite insane; the opener 'Circular Logic' lets you know what you're in for by its title, and by its skewed form. Deadly steel Frisbees will fly. Each piece has a kinetic circular shape much like a mad Catherine Wheel firework. Spinning, sparks of data flying off and burning into your forehead. The brain is melted by sonic reducers. Solid colour blocks and candy swirls, a session in an avant-garde vomitorium. A tab of acid as big as a doormat.

Indeed, *Interstellar Chemistry* promises acid-trips of intergalactic dimensions. The science fiction track titles such as 'Variable Star', 'From Elsewhere', 'Gravitation', 'Terminal Zone' and 'Go, No-Go Astronaut' all have tinges of Sun Ra and Philip K Dick (by way of Heldon), although 'Feast of Heathern' must refer to the novel by Jack Womack (whose work I recommend). Are these the usual nightmarish visions of impossible futures? A lonely outpost in the galaxy where mutants and chemical treatments reign supreme? Perhaps all is not lost. 'Bill is Horistaculturalist to Null's garden of unearthly delights,' babbles the press release; perhaps the musicians are trying cloud-seeding and new agricultural methods to repopulate a scorched earth, much like Captain Beefheart's Space-Age Couple are urged to 'cultivate the ground'. This CD overloads you with sonic information.

ED PINSENT 20/10/2002

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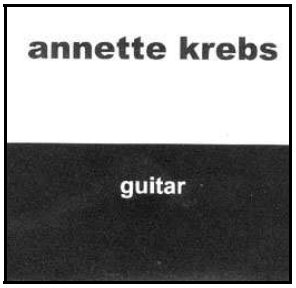
www.blrrecords.com

Annette Krebs
Guitar
FRANCE A BRUIT SECRET 05 3" CD (2002)

Another A Bruit Secret miniature - these little gems could even give Metamkine's *Cinema of The Ear* series a run for their money, as this release in particular occupies an interesting halfway zone somewhere between straight guitar improv and composed electro-acoustic antics. Some incredible noises are wrought hereon, making 20 minutes seem like as many months, and never once does a 'familiar' guitar sound pollute the purity of the episode. And what an episode it be...daytime television watchers will know it well, a twisted version of a cookery programme, as it starts with a kitchen blender device malfunctioning badly in the cuisine of darkness, with some evil white-haired harridan stalking the tiled floor late at night. This is followed swiftly by the copper kettle on the stove letting off steam, while the melting forks leap from the cutlery drawer and twist their tines into a solid, inextricable mess. Somewhere around the mid-section - and I ain't talking about my fat torso, bubba - comes a heavy fog of resounding bass tones that appear soft, but turn out to be deadly body blows that leave bruises for months. Yowch. Then comes the traumatic near-silence, while neurotic 18 year-old pregnant mum in the kitchen thinks what to do next - phone ignorant white trash boyfriend or start frying chips in the pan. She sensibly opts for the latter. Then three workmen arrive to install her new Hotpoint dryer and make a terrible mess of it, thumping around the house. What a headscratcher. The power of Annette's guitar can unleash a world like this into your mind, and do a lot more....let it mess with your physical and mental environments. It's a real-time composition, and not merely another improvisation record.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2002

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My Cat is An Alien
Landscapes of an electric city / Hypnotic spaces
USA ECSTATIC PEACE RECORDS AND TAPES E#54B 2 x VINYL LP (2002)

An amazing three sided LP from the Opalio brothers, recorded in Italy in 1999. The first two sides are devastating - mysterious guitarnoise improv, a long suite in three movements entitled 'Landscapes of an electric city', while the third side is an EP's worth of 'alien cat rock songs'. This is highly original music, but slow to kick off - the opening of 'Landscapes' is so downbeat and takes so long getting to the point that the casual listener may be tempted to shut it off, lose

patience or throw the whole package out of the window. It's a quiet, solitary acoustic guitar picking out two notes, meandering on and on, and pausing to allow a shrill blast of electronic noise or rumble to come bursting in, intrusively. Why? It's bizarre - however the skeletal form soon gathers some meat on its bones, and the piece starts to takes shape after some 10-15 minutes - at which point the Opalio plan starts to become clearer. The riff grows into an evil counterpart of a Popol Vuh guitar figure, circular in shape, and picking up more gobbets of abstract noise from the second (electric) guitar which has been chuntering in the background.

As we enter the electric city proper, it's twin electric guitars all the way, using that amplifier hum and the slightly muffled recording sound for all its worth - a bleating battle of clanging, fuzzy murk. Fans of early Crystallised Movements will certainly want to investigate at this point. This fascinating, relentless workout of crossed-axe devilry goes on for some time, and has a compelling and horrifying appeal. It isn't pretty music by any means, but its darkness remains true to the warped vision of urban misery and alienation that it aspires to depict. And we're not even at the end of side one yet! The next passage leans heavily on the echo chamber and spinning high-note string-wobblers that emulate the best of and the worst of Ash Ra Tempel - just managing to stay on the right side of chaos.

Side two starts off with a murmur which resembles slow traffic sound and other city noises - perhaps some genuine field recordings mixed in, as the weary brothers depict another grim working day in the hellish city, mingling abstract groans and grinds with guitar noise in a subtle, gritty melange of grey clouds and industrial waste. Mournful acoustic guitar laments are layered on top - the unheard and ignored voices of the oppressed. An oil refinery goes up in flames, and no-one notices. The third movement is the most limpidly beautiful, long and slow ambient rumbles with the odd guitar note raised in protest. The city claims more victims, crushing out their lives with slabs of solid concrete and snuffing out souls through the sheer drudgery of work. And how was *your* day?

Hypnotic Spaces is a bonus EP of 3 songs spread out into an LP side, and is a tad more conventional than the ultra-spacerock guitarscapes described above - but the declaiming voice is good, as are the warped guitar sounds used to realise the unusual song structures. There's an undeniable Sonic Youth influence - in fact the Youth arranged for this band to support them in summer 1998 at an Italian music festival in Torino, and later in 2000 on the NYC Ghosts and Flowers tour. Landscapes of an electric city - a musical statement about their home town of Torino - was originally released by the Opalios as a limited press CDR in 1999 and sent out as a mailart statement, as is much music these days. Now reissued as a hefty package of delight by the Ecstatic Peace mafia who vouchsafe unto us these words of wisdom about My Cat Is An Alien - 'Where they can go next may be almost anywhere we'd suspect, but Jupiter is a good guess'. Right on!

ED PINSENT 23/11/2002

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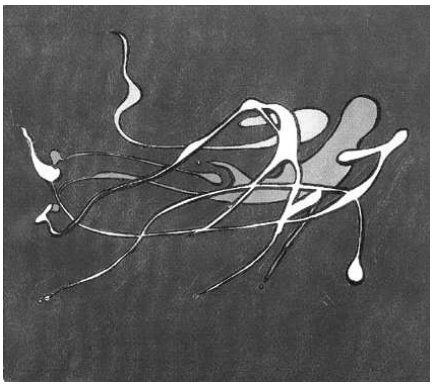

Keith Rowe and Oren Ambarchi

Flypaper

GERMANY STAUBGOLD 32 CD (2002)

A brilliant pairing of like minds here - the UK improv colossus Keith Rowe with his tabletop guitar, his short-wave radio, his crocodile clips and his hand-held fan, meets the Australian upstart Oren Ambarchi with his distinctive studio and playing technique that enables him to reshape normal guitar sounds into complex, layered waves of noise. Together, they give us four tracks of sheer excellence recorded in 2001 in Vallet and Sydney under the watchful ear of Joseph Suchy, himself a significant contributor to the international debate on guitar noise.

When musicians of renown assemble at the United Nations in downtown Newark to resume this debate, few guitars in the conference hall can match Keith Rowe's for luminosity, for glowing incandescence; he's a beacon in the darkness, and his lucidity guarantees him a place on the podium every time these modern guitarists hold a symposium. When Rowe's playing is combined with the slightly queasy, wobbling effects of Oren Ambarchi, the results have an astonishing power...the inner light of each instrument illuminates the complex crystalline structure that is growing and multiplying inside your head. The entire record pulses with the juices of life...it's a rich, throbbing organ, tumescent, its erectile tissue bulging. The sleeve art shows the trajectories of the spurts of jism squirting from this powerful member of vitality.

However, it might be excessively fanciful to claim that *Flypaper* is proposing a radical return to pagan, phallic rites, thus reclaiming the guitar-as-penis motif from the hands of a million masturbating heavy metal guitarists (and their air-guitar worshippers). In any case, the love-making techniques of both Rowe and Ambarchi as documented here are slow and deliberate, more like a long session of tantric sex than the quick orgasmic thrills promised by Metallica et al. Perhaps one should observe instead the sweet stickiness of this flypaper, the heavy syrup of its thick droning layers and the sticky quagmires that grow and accumulate from the competing frequencies of sound. These things alone make it an irresistible temptation to a housefly like myself. If you wish to join the pest convention, please hop aboard. This lovely short record is a gem of powerful noise and you will be happy to be ensnared by it.

ED PINSENT 22/10/2002

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Olaf Rupp

Scree

GERMANY GROB 433 CD (2002)

12 excellent slices of real-time, real-life razor sharp guitar improv from German plucksman Rupp, all acoustic and doused with olive oil. Imagine a Berlin-born Flamenco guitarist wearing shiny leather boots standing on his head, floating under the Irish sea and singing to the fishes - it's that good. No upstart Rupp, for he hath been strumming the ole six-stringed turtle for almost as long as he could talk, and some two years ago the powers that be released *Life Science* on the famous FMP label, home to many gigantic improvisers and some rather titchy ones..*en plus*, Rupp has earned his oats on the live circuit by playing with Paul Lovens, Butch Morris, Stephan Mathieu, Thomas Lehn, and many other A-List European free players. As title *Scree* suggests, listening to this CD is every bit as good as 'Riding The Scree', that Genesis album track from *Lamb Lies Down*. The mountain slope is steep and the ground is a long way off, but since the pebbles are firm, well-rounded and smooth, the ride to the bottom is length and invigorating. Not a laptop in sight - this is genuine musical playing from a craftsman who has learned himself some impressive chops, and can handle a wide variety of effects on his chopper. Dense ringing fills, sweeping textures as grand as the Australian outback, detailed fiddling like anxious maidens making lace with their nimble fingers, busy abstract scrabbling like Jackson Pollock drawing hurriedly on the side of a matchbox, and all-out thwomping attacks on the soundboard to produce a rudimentary percussion effect like angry aquatic pigs bumping against the side of a canoe. This release is only slightly ill-served by the luxury gatefold digipack art, which is murky video grabs of I know not what. The rich blue colour used to print these tableaux is good, but the vagueness of the imagery might lead a listener to expect something arty, boring and earnest. Which this is not.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2002

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The Spotnicks

The Very Best of the Spotnicks

AIR RECORDS LTD LP CHM 1171 (1977)

Joe Meek may have been able to Hear A New World but The Spotnicks actually visited it. Or at least that's the impression they tried to give us, making every public appearance dressed in space suits (a gimmick surely remembered by The Residents when they went on their famous shopping trip).

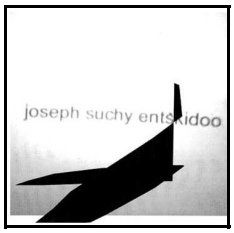
If they did make it into space, you can be sure it wasn't as intrepid explorers searching out new sounds. Nor did they hitch a ride on the satellite on which they based their name. More likely they were cabin entertainment for an interstellar pleasure ship, playing long-haul vacationeers familiar and unthreatening kitsch/trad covers selected to remind them of their various homes - tracks like 'Hava Nagila', 'Ol'e Faithful' and 'Amapola'.

The Spotnicks were actually a Swedish instrumental band formed in the late 50s (but named in the early 60s), and I believe they're still going today. This compilation features the best of their early material, some of which was successful in the UK. It'll be immediately apparent to anyone hearing this record that The Spotnicks were going less boldly where Joe Meek had been before - from the opening cover of 'Telstar', their preference for instrumentals, and the space theme which crops up (in song titles only, it has to be said), to a certain nostalgic feel somewhat at odds with their future-facing image.

They even made a (very limited) attempt at studio experimentation, although they achieved nothing in the league of Mr Meek, and once they'd established their sound, they sure stuck with it. Their equipment was built by Bo Winberg, The Spotnicks' own electronics wiz. He incorporated radio transmitters into the guitars and amps, allowing the band to play without leads. Useful in low-gravity I guess, and it supposedly accounts for the band's 'legendary Space Sound' (their words). It's an appropriately airless and slightly phased sound with a texture like aural velcro - the band seem to be twanging giant rubber bands rather than guitar strings (even the famous 'harp' glissandos on 'Telstar' get this treatment). It seems strangely appropriate that they recorded their music in an old plastics warehouse.

Considering their rather cumbersome costumes, they learnt to play pretty well, albeit so politely and tastefully that they make The Shadows sound like The MC5. The Spotnicks' guitarist rattles off complicated and intricate riffs as expertly as a magician performing a particularly deft sleight of hand, with all evidence of effort hidden from the audience. Flair's an unnecessary extra - every time the tremelo bar is whammed you can tell it's to an ISO-approved angle of swing. In fact the playing is scarily MIDI-like in it's precision - none of the notes overlap and it reminds me a little of those computer-composed songs that the Butthole Surfers did in their twilight days, which is not entirely a bad thing. It's strange that music so unexpressive should be likeable - but I do like this record a lot. I think it's the slightly heightened, hyperactive sound that gives them the edge over the zillions of similar bands of their era, and lifts them above the banality of their material, even if that means there more than a touch of the Space Chipmunk about it.

HARLEY RICHARDSON



Joseph Suchy

Entskidoo

GERMANY ENTENPFUHL EMM LP 05 CD (2001)

A great, rich and loud guitar blowout, of explosive Hindenburg proportions. After a brief melodic introduction, this gargantuan CD quickly launches into outer space and we're off in orbit...force-fed like pygmies into the mouth of King Kong, who chews us up with his mighty teeth the size of sofa beds! Brilliant and blistering slide guitar solos, full-on power strums with heavy echo effects, crashing against a huge tidal wave of solid layers of sonic brickwork. Suchy uses the full panoply of studio technique to apply his thick impasto paint in bright primary colours, spilling his guts and splashing buckets of emulsion around the arena like a rampaging circus clown. Then, in come the loud-volume high-intenso organ swells...and your entire house collapses under the weight of it.

German Suchy is probably more electric pylon than man, bestriding the suburbs of Cologne with his steel-girder legs planted in the earth. The scale, dimension and volume of this work is formidable, even though it is clearly concocted within the four walls of the recording studio - it's the fantasy wild-man adventures of a crazed loon playing in the imaginary forest of avant-guitar noiseographics. Joyous too it be. Suchy is the happy man of a smiling Hendrix rag doll, not the sad man of a Keiji Haino china figurine in pose suggesting pain or imminent doom. Besides the great unrestrained 'free playing' from his massive wangeroo, Suchy also boasts top-heavy overload effects which are compounded by some clever hard-disk editing. In fact this assemblage is more like 'folding' the sounds together, overlapping the many layers of puff pastry into each other to produce what is described here as 'a rhizomatous adaptation of an imaginary archive of avant-garde music'. Rhizomes - don't you just love 'em? I never go without my daily dose of rhizomes.

Indeed, the listening possibilities inherent in this kinetic, kaleidoscopic airship of musical barra-bondage are quite multitudinous - entire histories of rock music, jazz, psychedelia and avantish noodlings may be discerned in its twisting patterns. Fans of guitar-based Krautrock, for example the early LPs of Guru Guru, are guaranteed permanent grins for the next 50 minutes, as is anyone who just likes sheer excess. The two long suites 'Entskidoo A' and 'Entskidoo B' are the real killer cuts, although 'Gump' and 'Tijovo' also have lots to recommend them, both more contemplative in the mode of Joni Mitchell's mid-period LPs, played on a hairdryer. Recorded in Cologne, this is Suchy's fourth solo LP..his 2000 release *Smi2le* was described last ish by our Jennifer Hor as 'a whirling maelstrom of heaving guitar noise and punishing feedback and effects assaults on the ear and brain'. I intend to investigate his catalogue retrospectively, recommend you do likewise.

ED PINSENT 18/11/2002

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Tarentel

Mort aux Vaches

THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT NO NUMBER CD (2000)

Fans of post-rock guitar music in the tradition set by Labradford, Doldrums, Windy and Carl and various others may like to check out this live offering by San Francisco band Tarentel. First up is 'Adonai:, a mostly repetitive atmospheric piece reminiscent of Labradford in the mid-90s about the time of that band's second album 'A Stable Reference': the guitar tones shine and almost reverberate and the mood is sombre though not gloomy. Then, as if to demonstrate that they're not just another droney guitar bunch, Tarentel swing into 'Steede Bonnet', an urgent guitars-drums piece in the manner of a smooth Do Make Say Think or a less symphonic and more enervated Godspeed You Black Emperor! It's a pleasant though not exhilarating piece marred by a lot of mucking about with sound effects and echoes in the last few minutes of the

track. After this, it's back to a study of moody repetition in 'When no one's listening' with resonant guitar tones and conventional rhythms that make for a ho-hum piece of music occasionally jolted from dozing off with a loud cymbals bang or a jarring guitar chord.

The final track 'For Carl Sagan' could have been an exercise in fuzzy space drones and thick nebulae of guitar effects and textures but instead it's a laidback, self-recycling ramble with a bit of squeaking guitar in the background initially and then building up through repetition to a not-very-satisfying climax of lite metal-style wall-of-guitar textures that fades into a series of disconnected moody bits including a mournful harmonica.

So on second thoughts maybe fans of post-rock guitar music should pass up on this addition to the Hindu-friendly (not!) *Mort aux Vaches* radio performance series and check out Tarentel's previous releases if they're still interested in this band's work - I understand three of the tracks on this CD have appeared on the group's previous records so you won't be missing out on much. There's too much repetition on this CD which is not balanced by much evidence of inspired performance or enthusiasm though the musicians themselves may have been enthusiastic at the time. I wonder whether Tarentel are also still searching for their own identity and style that doesn't lean too much on the likes of early Labradford and Doldrums on the one hand and GYBE! on the other, and maybe a few more live gigs together (I believe Tarentel don't play live very much and they have also had many line-up changes) may see a definite style and direction emerge.

JENNIFER HOR

www.staalplaat.com
www.tarentel.com

Steve Tibbetts

A Man About A Horse

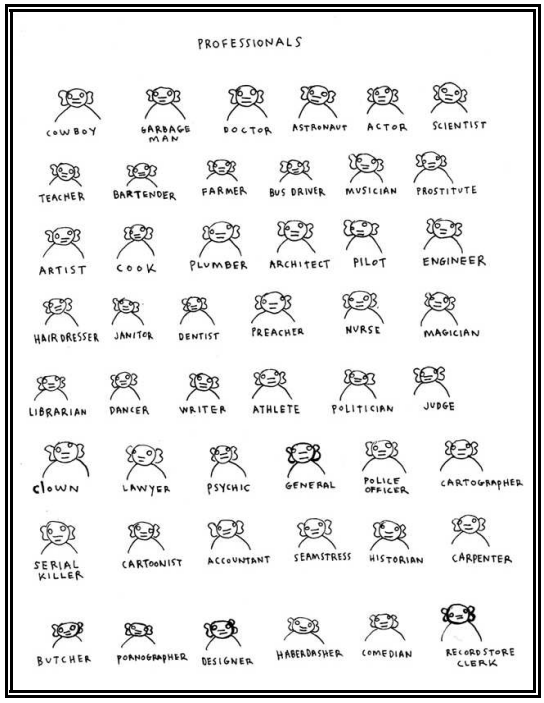
GERMANY ECM RECORDS
ECM1814 CD (2002)

Anyone who's ever heard Jello Biafra's *No More Cocoons* will know that the stand-out track is 'Names For Bands' where JB reels off a list of entirely plausible punk band names to the howling delight of the audience.

The list includes 'John Wayne on Acid', 'Ku Klux Flintstones', 'Be My Urinal' and 'Satan's Buttermilk', amongst many others. One band name he does come up with requires some explanation - to paraphrase: 'When you get a little bit older and it's time to reach for that audio sedative, mellow-out with the good vibe from 'Earth Fart'.

And I suspect 'Earth Fart' is exactly what JB would say if he ever copped for the work of Steve Tibbetts. And I'm damn sure he would puke all over his 'No-one Knows I'm A Lesbian' t-shirt if he read ECM's description of Tibbetts as an 'innovative Minnesota-based guitarist and sound-explorer.' It just oozes with pretension and everything that punk set out to destroy. But I'm afraid to say that with the ancient punk blueprint starting to look decidedly dog-eared and threadbare in the hands of fuckstumps like Blink 182 and even 'relevant' acts like Sonic Youth dragging their heels, the old order is starting to look a little bit haggard itself, and there's few things more pathetic than the sight of aged punks – bald spots and leather jackets, pot bellys straining through DK t-shirts- still trying to rise to an occasion that has long since passed them by.

It's far better – and far more dignified – to admit that you don't really need to be doing this anymore, and what's so wrong with a bit of mellow anyway? So, yeah, maybe Tibbetts is something you can only appreciate when you reach a certain stage in life and you've got some bile and spunk out of your system, but is that intrinsically a bad thing? I mean, it's not like he's doing end-of-the-pier 80s pop revival here, this is interesting stuff which, if you really give it the ear it deserves, proves to have multiple layers and complexity in spades. And it's not complexity for the sake of it. His guitar work is loose but with a full range – from acoustic sleight to strident echoing power chords – that reminds me of Roy Montgomery. The bass & drums carry the music forward, making the frame in which Tibbetts looses sounds that you could call whatever you wanted: 'shimmering', 'washes', 'echoes', ambient'. It doesn't really matter – this is music as abstract expressionism, open to different interpretations and only as good as the intentions and spirit the listener brings to it. The track titles have a vaguely 'ethnic' flavour to them – 'Black Temple', 'Chandoha', 'Koshala' – which evoke, for me at least, the ancient temples of Angkhor.



Yes, this music is perfect for award-winning BBC wildlife documentaries. Yes, it would not appall even the fussiest of guests at a Hampstead Heath dinner party. But fuck it, I like it, and that's all that matters isn't it?

RIK RAWLING 29/10/2002

www.ecmrecords.com

Keith Fullerton Whitman

Playthroughs

USA KRANKY KRANK 055 CD (2002)

Here's another CD to add to the ever-expanding pile of guitar improv CDs that threatens to push you out of your home; everything you hear on *Playthroughs* is sourced from a guitar of some sort or another, electric, acoustic or otherwise, and transformed through a laptop computer into 5 tracks of tone poems and mood pieces. The first track sets the pace (mostly restful) as a plaintive piece of drawn-out tones and spaces. 'fib0la' does not differ significantly apart from a section where the sounds seem to wobble against a background of clear drones as if KFW has got hold of the laptop equivalent of a not particularly wobbly wobble board. Shimmering waves of rough sound ebbing back and forth like rough surf breaking over gravelly sand and alternating with drones of a church organ distinguish 'feedback zwei'; there is a spiritual quality to this track but there's also perhaps too much activity bouncing between those rough textures and the drones, and not enough space within the piece for it to be really spiritual and meditative. The fourth track is heavy-handed in execution and monotonous. 'modena' saves the day with a bit more delicacy and variety of tones and melodies than the previous tracks; a serene and positive mood dominates throughout this very long piece before it tails off into nothingness.

All these tracks are well constructed and distinctive despite the limited range of moods and the slow pace, and our man KFW does not fall for that stupid convention in which the last track of an album has to involve some real strumming to convince the punters that 'yes, you're hearing a real guitar album'. But if you're looking for something to be the life of your next party, look past *Playthroughs*; it's pleasant in parts but doesn't have much vitality and at least two tracks have codas that trail on for far too long. (I should add that the album is dedicated to the memory of someone dear to KFW so it is like an elegy and this perhaps explains the sombre mood throughout the album.) Our man KFW is capable of a lot more than *Playthroughs* suggests: his Hrvatski project is almost a by-word for hyperactivity and ranges from breakbeats that hit the speed-of-light barrier to singing, field recordings and shimmering guitar showers, and the guy's knowledge of music is astounding (I hope and feverishly pray that he or the rest of the Forced Exposure folks can dig up some more juicy Scandinavian 60s and 70s psychedelic rock gems) so, yes, I am disappointed with *Playthroughs* - OK perhaps it is an elegy but even elegiac recordings need healthy injections of passion or feeling and maybe even some anger would not go astray. Anyway, at this time of writing (Nov 2002) there is a new Hrvatski recording out so maybe we should go check that out instead.

JENNIFER HOR

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TAPE MASCHINES MAKEN

Also including cut-ups, edits and other fine manipulations of that greasy sound source

William Basinski

The Disintegration Loops

USA MUSEX INTERNATIONAL NO NUMBER CD (2002)

A beautiful work, and fascinating too. A process piece which is really extremely moving, and here deployed as an individual artistic statement about the events of 11 September and the fall of the twin towers in NYC, although actually realised some time before that disaster. In transferring some of his early recorded compositions from plastic tape to digital storage, Basinski noticed the tapes were so old they were falling to pieces in the transfer process - the oxide flaking right off the plastic backing. Accordingly, what we hear over some 63 minutes is a fragment of stately orchestral music, and a the sound of a tape loop slowly dying and disintegrating. (The analogue 'warmth' of the process adds a great deal to the solemnity and sadness of the piece). For Basinski, this operation had personal resonances - not only the loss of his early work, but also the loss of his youth, and the loss of a vision of a pastoral, happier America; lost innocence, perhaps. All of these emotional states are writ large in *The Disintegration Loops*, where he applies the personal sense of loss to this collective tragedy. In fact, he and his friends were listening to this music as they watched the towers burning a mile away. But no passive observer of suffering, as Basinski explains, he has engaged with that disaster both in practical and artistic terms, and has very much played his part to help improve the world, now finding that he has been happy to sacrifice his early recordings on the altar of his belief that art can change the world. Now I need hardly tell you that there's been a lot of bogus sentiment exhibited in relation to this over-discussed 9/11 event; now is your chance to hear some real emotion (and dignity) for a change!

ED PINSENT 24/11/2002

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William Basinksi is interviewed this issue.

Michèle Bokanowski

L'étoile Absinthe

FRANCE METAMKINE MKCD031 3" CD (2002)

New bleat from famed French composer Bokanowski who last reached this magazine in 2001 with her excellent CD *Trois Chambres d'Inquiétude* on the USA Elevator Bath label. Here's a small tranche of more 'traditional' musique concrète realised from her own studio in 1999-2000 and which debuted in Paris as part of a series of INA-GRM concerts. It's a truly phantomic disc. The breathy gasps of a startled woman's voice dominate the album, a disembodied voice - as if caught floating among stars and blue night skies - perhaps the sound of the evil Fairy Queen when she catches sight of her own twisted visage in her magic mirror...that shock of recognition as you encounter a hidden part of your psyche. These rather alarming gasps of terror are accompanied by stabs of unresolved and mixed chords, repeated in relentless bursts so as to wear down your resistance, creating a tense and anxiety-filled composition. Lovely. Eventually, the piece settles down and leads you away to a march tempo, so you pace defeated step after step into a doomed world, head hung low. Absinthe - one of the few alcoholic beverages I haven't tried, strangely - can probably induce this astonishing state of mental and physical disconnectedness, in a way that normal hangovers can't even begin to affect you. Bokanowski succeeds admirably in conveying this desirable condition. But maybe the alcohol content is a red herring. Apparently she got the phrase from Ingmar Bergman, who used it when discussing his film *The Seventh Seal and The Apocalypse*. She liked the apparent antagonism in the juxtaposition of these words, and applied it to the 'dissonant' music she was creating at the time.

ED PINSENT 10/11/2002

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Brume

Zona Ventille

UNITED KINGDOM / USA ELSIE AND JACK RECORDINGS # 008 CD (2001)

An excellent recording that clearly shows the life-long love affair that all Frenchmen have with science fiction - be it manifested in movies or literature, there are certain French fellows who can't get enough of the stuff, as they dress up like 'Klaatu' and attend week-long Sci-Fi 'cons' held in the suburbs of important French and Belgian cities like Lyons, Le Havre and Knokke-Le-Zoute. Where Heldon indulged their sci-fi passion with cold, high-tech rhythms and extended guitar solos, Brume aims for remaking the dark Ambient mode with this 'constantly mutating soundscape'. He concocts a monstrous mix of spitting and throbbing electronic soup, with lots of nasty distorted voices poking out of ungainly holes torn into the envelope. This is a hydra-like monster with a cracked shell, turning turtle as it tumbles weightlessly through galaxies unknown. The distorted and compressed voices, spurting out radio-speech in broken fragments, vaguely suggest some unfolding sci-fi story of doomy proportions - one thinks of the cinema of Chris Marker, or of Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*. Both of which, very coincidentally, have inspired musical tributes (see *Sul* this issue for the former).

The Zona Ventille is clearly not a good place for humans to be; from the sound of it, the future is pretty much one big underground chamber filled with oil drums, flames, and crushing walls of steel. This record may not be quite as scary as it would like to be, but it is nonetheless a fascinating odyssey into a fully-realised world with all the grimy surface detail of a Terry Gilliam movie set - a vision that his many art directors would approve of. In like manner, the image Brume presents of himself is no less striking - he proposes the composer of the future as a sort of Cyberman / Ice Warrior styled tape archivist, creating and curating his work within the confines of a decaying storage area.

This is Christian Renou's final release as Brume apparently, and it arrives in a sumptuous package from Elsie and Jack with a tracing-paper insert and plenty of unreadable messages overprinted on the blue-and-silver artworks. The potentially Romantic image of a discarded ball-gown on the floor is transformed in this context to the surface of the ocean on a hostile planet. It also arrives wrapped in glowing tributes from the label bosses who are clearly very taken with the work of this man: 'More than mere process, this is an artifact of sheer beauty, intrigue and suspense', they gush, 'in the tradition of Pierre Henry and Luis Bunuel'. I wasn't aware that either of those shared any kind of tradition, but I take the point.

ED PINSENT 02/11/2002

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Eric La Casa / Slavek Kwi

Fonderie Paccard

FRANCE COLLECTIF ET COMPAGNIE C&C MTS 04 CD (2002)

A fascinating work which derives from recordings of a bell foundry in France. Eric La Casa recorded considerable yardage of tapes in that lively environment, capturing what he may, and mostly represents these back to the audience as 'Incandescence' parts 1-3, thus delivering to my mind the more successful half of this work. He renders a very strong sense of place, of a real and physical location - the first cut translates as 'HERE', and that 'hereness' is very strongly expressed. And that isn't just through the use of loud volume (although you get that too). He worked out a tripartite composition, based on three ways of listening to this space; through acoustic science, he had 'regard for the spatial qualities'. Although the opening moments of 'Ici' may mislead you into thinking that every random moment is thoughtlessly captured, in fact it becomes clear that the opposite applies. Selected information is crammed into a sonic frame. Hissing, bells, clattering and thumping of workmen moving around, performing their ancient mystery. The familiar becomes alien, then grows familiar again. I envisage a giant conveyor belt leading outside the foundry and carting a heavenly procession of enormous bells up to the stars.

La Casa's stated aim is to 'interrogate our perception of the real' and build up a 'dialogue between the outside and the inside'. The interior workings of his mind and body are just as much a part of this work. Indeed, the quiet slow and immersive work will massage your guts as much as it intrigues your cerebellum; it's physically and intellectually demanding here in the foundry. La Casa's tapes have been further treated by Slavek Kwi on part two of the record, on his 'Bellios' parts I-II. Not quite as immediately fascinating, Kwi's work exhibits a taste for over-abstraction. No reference to the original source is discernable, and ultimately the music is largely emptied of all content in favour of textural experimentation. However, this separation was all part of the plan; Kwi didn't visit the foundry himself, and wound up only knowing whatever La Casa told him in sound. 'He chooses not to listen to Eric's composition', it says here, and he picked up all the tape segments that didn't make it into the final cut of 'Incandescence' to realise his work.

The 'ouvriers de la fonderie' are thanked for their co-operation in this work, although it's clear that La Casa isn't interested in presenting anything other than a one-step removed aesthetic experience - he's not making a documentary. This is reflected in the choice of imagery for the sleeve - photos that privilege the texture, light and shade of a cast bell's rough surface, over images of the workmen. Which isn't to say I'd prefer anything else. Interestingly, the final step of the work was for both musicians to play back their pieces to the workers in the very foundry they'd been recorded in - for which kindness, the workers promptly seized the artists and threw them, shrieking, headlong into a cauldron of boiling bronze.

ED PINSENT 20/10/2002

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Yves Daoust

Bruits

CANADA EMPREINTES DIGITALES 0156 CD (2001)

Wonderful but infuriatingly familiar. First track sounds like either a tribute or a total rip off of Francois Bayle. It is brilliantly done and immensely entertaining but perhaps only fabulous mimicry rather than truly inventive and exploratory. I wonder whether I would have made the same criticism had I not heard anything from GRM prior to listening to this disc. Pastiche is an exciting area to explore but this disc isn't presented as such. The problem for any exploratory music such as that now labelled 'electroacoustic' is that the signatures that identify it become almost instantly an obstacle to further exploration. Anyway, by track 4 Yves has become increasingly cinematic in approach. He has a highly developed technical expertise and a great ear for arresting aural dynamics but maybe hasn't the adventurous spirit of those artists he so much admires.

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EA

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POLAND IGNIS DI 011 CD (2002)

Another fine release from the Ignis Projekt label in Poland - here be Patryk Zakrocki, Viön, and Membrana marching purposely into town with their boxload of 'manipulated field recordings' and producing a highly successful modern take on musique concrète. The care and attention they put into the work is clear - what really comes across is their concern to realise a properly-composed, thought-through piece of music. A combination of chimes, tones, buzzes and many mysterious narrative fragments - footsteps on floorboards, voices, heavy passionate breathing, figures vaguely moving from one room to another, a cocktail party. Perhaps this is the soundtrack to a virtual game of Cluedo come to life; you certainly get this sense of being inside a room-like space, but not knowing quite where you are, or where you're going to end up next. A haunted house, with secret passages, distorting mirrors and floors that drop away. Then there's the more abstract components, a swelling ocean of 'growing harmonic noise' all around you. Much listening pleasure is afforded by these continuous, grinding noises - long rumblings and groanings, all

proceeding at a very slow pace and maintaining a steady tension throughout. Towards the end the piece becomes gradually more attenuated; all recognisable sound events drop away, leaving only small abstract sounds, little electronic tones and the remnants of loop effects sadly spinning away.

Previously this Polish group had been making guitar-based ambient drone-works of some kind or other - never heard any, but there's a seven-inch on the German Drone label. Here, they use virtually no instruments - just a bunch of field recordings and found sounds from their international jaunts to Span, Norway, Morocco, Austria - plus some fragments plucked from parts of Poland. These were combined with pure electronic noises, sine waves and white noise. Then came the usual filtering and treatment work using laptops and 8-track, so that they now boast 'nothing on this record is what it seems'. Amazingly, they completed this spellbinding semi-narrative mystery novel live in the studio in one session, with no overdubs. Perhaps this discipline is what gives *r* its coherence.

ED PINSENT 02/11/2002

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Escape Mechanism, Steev Hise, The Tape-Beatles and Wobbly

Minneapolis Summit October 2001

THE NETHERLANDS STAALPLAAT STMCD 021 3" CD (2002)

Free form sampling – well not quite. A twenty-minute ad-hock montage awash with voice samples. It's a bit of a mess but the participants manage to prevent the proceedings dissolving into a total shout-each-other-down noise-fest. Nothing quite fits together - like rapidly switching on and off a radio, randomly kicking a Dansette and indulging the whims of a malfunctioning CD player. These guys have produced much better work than this.

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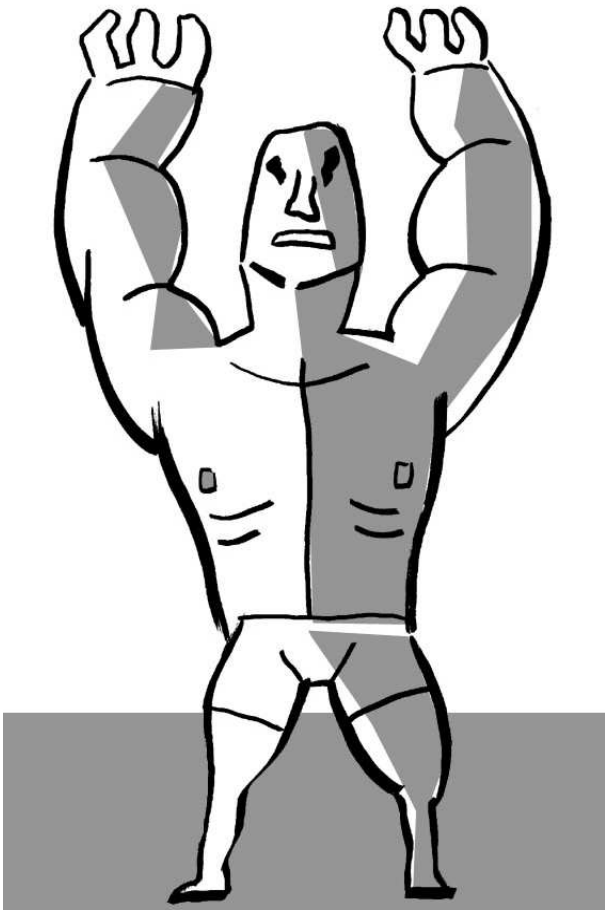
Michael Gendreau

55 Pas de la Ligne au No 3

USA 23FIVE INCORPORATED 002 CD (2002)

For this release, Californian sound artist Gendreau has modified old record-players and souped them up like custom cars - what we're hearing is a slowly rotating vinyl disk with a heavy old tonearm, to produce a monstrous grind. He has no interest whatsoever in the content of the records. All he wants is the 'dead' part of the pressing, resulting in a kind of pure inertness. The equipment sometimes howls in protest at this maltreatment, but what can be done about it? Nothing! It's a simple process art that totally transcends its methods of production, and offers a glimpse of something beyond, something bizarrely affecting. It may not be an entirely heart-warming vision. When I first saw the cover photo on this 'blackly' packaged release, I assumed immediately that it depicted an awful abyss of doom...an endless culvert running underneath the very bowels of Hades. I couldn't wait to hear the abysmal sonic message that might accompany this despatch from such a darkened, Saturnine realm.

Of course, the cover photo is nothing of the sort - merely a close-up of the micro–grooves of a distressed old 78 records, one of the artefacts abused by Gendreau in pursuit of his diabolical aims. But nothing dispels the oppressive feeling generated by this relentless sound-art...of the two long tracks, 'Two Worlds For Now' is certainly aligned with the school of thought that desires to bury the listener alive in smothering layers of oppressive, heavy sound. A claustrophobia-inducing sensation begins in the ears and quickly spreads to the entire body. Don't play this on a winter's night when you're snowed in at home, or cabin fever will set in immediately. The title work, which combines a sense of ruthless mathematical precision and somehow suggests an ultra-efficient railroad engineer measuring damage to his tracks, comprises at least two or more of these turntable experiments running simultaneously, or overdubbed in the studio, and thus



produces a slightly more sonically varied effect. Powerful stuff - the single idea is squeezed for everything it's got.

Gendreau would probably appreciate my mistaken apprehension of the cover photo, as 'repression of the recognizability of any particular tool, medium or instrument' is what he's all about. Apparently he's produced entire operas and miniature symphonies with Suzanne Dycus in Crawling With Tarts, using only sets of old 78 records and 9-volt motors. But never has the source been cunningly disguised in an attempt to 'fool' the listener - it's just rendered into something totally unfamiliar. Besides exploring the unused 'dead spaces' on his records, he also amplifies the motors, gears and belts of his old turntables using devices called accelerometers. These are far more sensitive to vibrations than boring old contact mics, so the slightest bump or mistake in the process causes sonic havoc - 'when Gendreau inevitably drops the needle on the record, the whole cavity of the turntable resonates with those vibrations inscribed in the vinyl', says the press release, audibly slavering with delight. For real fetishists, close-up full-colour photographs of the modified turntables are included in the CD booklet, presented with a near-pornographic attention to detail...cor, check out the tone-arm on that! As the press release points out, this work has nothing whatever to do with DJ turntabling, nor does it align itself with avant-turntabling artists such as Jesse Paul Miller, Philip Jeck or Christian Marclay, all of whom have some interest (no matter how remote) in the content of the original records they use. Nor does Gendreau share the passion that Climax Golden Twins have for old, scratchy 78 records and the ghostly voices from the past that float off them - this record is all about machinery, rotation and industrial grind and it ploughs its narrow furrow with single-minded purpose.

ED PINSENT 09/11/2002

www.23five.org

Zbigniew Karkowski

Consciously Unconscious Unconsciously Conscious

FRANCE METAMKINE MKCD033 3" CD (2002)

A fine modern piece of musique concrète realised in 2001 in the Tokyo hideaway of this Polish-Swedish composer. Less outwardly aggressive than the grandiose *World As Will II* meisterwerk (see elsewhere) this miniature slice of activity depicts a fierce internalised anger churning up inside the composer's guts, as he snarls and scowls at the world from inside a blackened chamber. Perhaps the very title suggests a coma from which he cannot wake up, or his unhealthy musings on the fate of being buried alive - his body paralysed yet his mind still active and racing. The more you hear from this evil Pole, the less inclined you are to casually drop round to his cottage in Tokyo for a nice cup of tea and a friendly chat.

'All theory and systems of music, as cultural concepts, have to be destroyed', is the extreme opinion of Karkowski expressed in press-release speak. Therefore this work is based on 'architectures of ruins', so that he might better depict the state of the conventional musical world as he would like to leave it. The results of this scorched-earth policy? Sonically, he simply grinds out his familiar basic black-headache throbbing music, cementing it on top additional blocks of chugs, drones, whines and hums...it induces the comatose state in miniature, allowing the listener to carry around a pebble of cancer-like material in the head for ten days. Black, black like tar...

ED PINSENT 02/11/200

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Lionel Marchetti

Train de Nuit (Noord 3-683)

FRANCE METAMKINE MKCD029 3" CD (2002)

An ingenious composition, which works well on so many layers - paying tribute to one of the great musique concrète composers and to the history of the music, negotiating a successful incorporation of poetic and surrealist elements, and yet emerging as a fully modern and completely integrated piece of composition. As any student of this 'genre' will recognise, both title and music reference Pierre Schaeffer's classic 1948 composition 'Etude Aux Chemins de Fer', one of the *Five Noise Studies* which are among Schaeffer's earliest published works and perhaps some of the earliest known manifestations of this form of composition. Marchetti's intention was to return to the roots of this mode of working, mindful of the fact that the earliest musique concrète was played back on a single loudspeaker, causing 'a strange and disturbing face-to-face [meeting] between a loudspeaker's unique diaphragm and the ear head of the listener'. Concert performances of this work are therefore played back on a single loudspeaker at Marchetti's insistence, and he requests that we do the same on record.

The distinctive train whistle 'toots' from Schaeffer's original are audible in Marchetti's take on the subject - appearing like pale ghosts from the past. Marchetti updates the theme of the railway journey with carloads of additional voice tapes, perhaps captured from the radio or films, adding infinite narrative possibilities - at times it sounds like 1920s ballroom chatter of the rich and bright young things with vaguely audible band music playing in the background. This adds a dimension of the 'classic days of railway travel', like first class carriages on the Orient Express. Then again, we also hear seconds of modern thumping dance music from some nameless 1990s Techno club, which invokes the not-so-classic days of rail travel when like as not the whole train ends up spray-painted with graffiti by nightclub revellers.

Then there's the surreal subtext invoked by the use of a Blaise Cendrars text, inserted on the inside of the pocket where it's very difficult to read. 'J'ai vu les train silencieux, les trains noirs,' sings Cendrars. The rail journey is thus connected to all the surreal train stations painted by de Chirico, and the famous Magritte image of the engine emerging from the fireplace in Time Transfixed. Marchetti accrues layers of meaning, just as he carefully constructs layers of tape edits - each semi-transparent sound window shifts sideways, or falls away, to reveal another sound window beneath. A veritable odyssey unfolds in 21:50 minutes. A train journey through space and time, with thousands of passengers on board, a cross-section of all human life, while the goods carriages are loaded with a cargo of memories. Simply amazing.

ED PINSENT 16/11/2002

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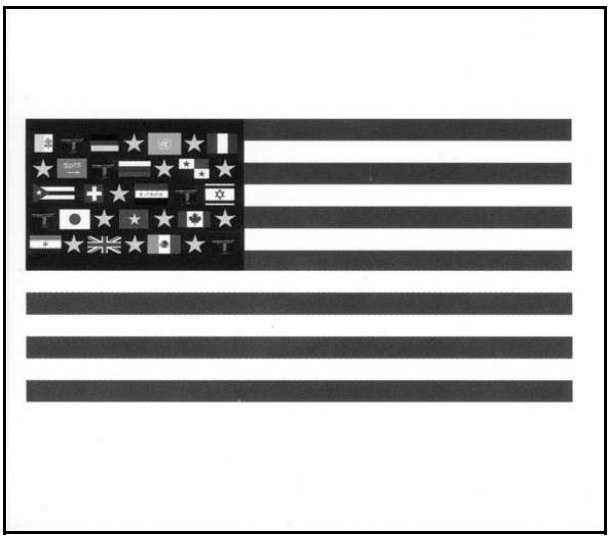
A few notes:

Blaise Cendrars - Surrealist poet, appeared in early issues of *Litterature*. Apparently closer to the avant-garde of Appolinaire and Picasso than the other Surrealist writers.

Schaeffer's Chemin De Fer work appears on *L'Oeuvre Musicale*, the 3 CD collection of his work INA GRM MUSICDISC 292 572. Also on *Ohm: The Early Gurus of Electronic Music*, Ellipsis Arts CD3670.

Lionel Marchetti produced the exceptional electro-acoustic work *Vier Vorspiele / L'Oeil retourné* with RLW in 1998. He also works with Jerome Noetinger in live performances.



Christopher Penrose

American Jingo

USA ILLEGAL ART 102 CD (2000)

The visual rhetoric surrounding this curiously compelling music by Japanese resident Christopher Penrose suggests it's intended as an expat's critique of his homeland: a hunch confirmed by webblurb which describes the latter of the two tracks on this recording as 'chronicling the assassination of JFK'. The cover depicts the Stars and Stripes in varied guises that allude without subtlety to US political, corporate, military and Masonic hegemony worldwide. A worthy subject for radical new art, for sure, but is this recording either radical or new? Well no, but it's very enjoyable and terrifically lighthearted- all its furrowed-brow seriousness seemed only to increase my joie-de-vivre to levels of near-simpering glee. This is music to play on a balmy Wednesday morning in late April, after something pleasant has happened to you. For connoisseurs of lush televisual cheese, an appropriate analogy might be *The Good Life*, that bastion of late 1970's BBC light entertainment: cosy, reassuring, and nicely banal. Except that it would be unfair to accuse *American Jingo* of banality- somehow with music of this calibre its level of banality relative to its parent culture becomes an irrelevance. More to the point is the efficacy of the mong it induces- and these are terribly monged sounds, by which I mean they promote and induce measurable levels of catalepsy in both stoned and unstoned people. I guess the trick to this

kind of warped collaging of obscure source-materials (and concomitant invocation of the mong-vortex) is to ensure that the altered states engendered are at least experienced as impulses toward growth, progress, more inclusive meaning, an *enhancement* of some sort. Otherwise, a work such as *American Jingo* with its overt political agenda becomes hoist by its own petard (if you'll forgive me)- merely adding to the cultural desensitisation it exists to challenge, another art-cloud of passing interest to sonic necrophiles, but little else....

Rather parsimoniously having got my little dig in there, I'll move on to reiterate that hey, I really do enjoy this record- it's a gas. I still don't give a fuck about JFK, but I intend that wholly as a commendation of the music, for 'twould disturb me were any piece of recorded sound capable of stimulating my thoughts toward contemplation of such crass political theatre- can't we feel AmeriKKKa in our jaded imperialist stomachs without having to piss about over who shot who from the fucking grassy knoll in 1963- I don't know, you can probably see where I'm coming from, I don't expect Christopher Penrose would approve but I LIKE THIS RECORD, it's possessed of a peculiar pathos and femininity, Penrose whips up his sounds like a Renaissance theurgist dragging thought-elementals from the dense zones of consensus trance and up Jacob's ladder into angelic realms of shrivelling purity. They howl their protest, but to no avail- the title track documents their inexorable rise and transformation into spluttering fractals. Crepuscular ambiences move through interior tunnels- uterine? neural? qabalistic?- a voice declares 'She is America', and by the conclusion of the piece a real sense of structure has built up, tempered by modish absurdism I daresay, but you can't have everything. Second (and last) track 'MK/ULTRA', the JFK epic- some good, hard punishing bits (though never pornographic), deep drones in purple and icy gold, a panicked functionary rasping Area 51-style nightmare terrors in pitiless monochrome, before an effete drumloop flounces across the mix and bids us chase it into the horrid desert at the 'heart' of this piece, namely a Steven Hawking-soundalike robovoice reciting flatulent homilies in an airless featureless cube. It eventually jams on 'Walk slowly...but kill that motherfucker if he tries to take your money' which is repeated over sufficient duration for thoughts to cohere regarding the meaninglessness of the current auditory experience. Is this part of the act? Oh, how reassuring, it's blasted away by a power-shower of jerking, Auschwitz feedback and the crust of a human voice, freaking and sobbing. Solid ground again. Oh, it's finished.

Despite my earlier proviso for attempting to critically assess this unchallengingly enjoyable music (which made me *really* enjoy The Sex Pistols when I stuck *Bollocks* on immediately afterwards), I'm not sure I can say if there's anything enhancing about the states (small 's') it both embodies and critiques. If there's a cogent point in here regarding the relationship between these sounds and the entity that is the USA, it's lost on me. As a sort of mail-order catalogue for astral objects of dubious repute, it's pretty neat. As a fucked-up noisy shitmess- well, I've heard better!

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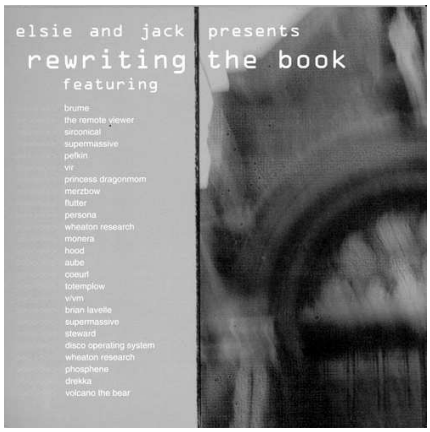
Various Artists



Elsie and Jack presents Rewriting The Book

UNITED KINGDOM / USA ELSIE AND JACK RECORDINGS #009C 2 x CD (2001)

This monstrous compilation demands a great deal of stamina and a considerable level of mature self-acceptance from the listener, so let me take this opportunity to warn anybody who's thinking of checking it out- you'd better have your shit together, it might be an idea to enter into some sort of psychotherapy for, say, two years before allowing this object anywhere near your stereo, it wouldn't do to listen to much of it without at least having established an opening dialogue between your ego and whatever complexes you've got going on in your subconscious mind....I should think it would be all too easy for this double-CD to serve as a lens for amplifying the shadows these complexes cast on the projection-screen of your carefully-circumscribed sense of 'persona'. And then where would you be? Clucking and gobbling like a mandrake-crazed child whenever the fridge started humming or

the plumbing creaked, that's where! Never mind cartoon rap records, 'they' should be putting Parental Advisory stickers on these chic minimalist laptop-happy blip-glitch-squiggle compilations that seem so *de rigueur* and often so very fatuous *at the same time* (clever, that). Straight outta Vienna! Or something.

I haven't heard the CD upon which this mammoth 'remix' project was founded, which is an, ahem, *ambitious* work by Akifumi Nakajima (aka Aube) entitled *Pages from the Book* (it came out on Elsie and Jack Recordings in 2000 and was reviewed in TSP 8th - unfavourably, as I recall). The press release describes it thus:

'Aube created 61 sounds, ranging from 10 second loops to 4 minute drones, using a copy of the King James Bible.'

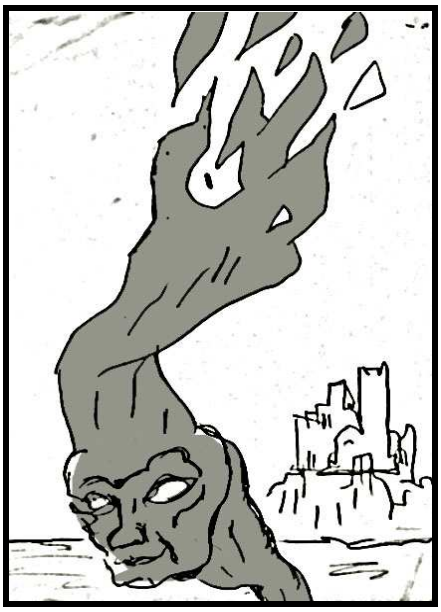
Yes that's right, a bunch of samples of Aube playing with bits of paper which, as it happens, were being used at the time to contain Biblical texts compiled in what most people seem to regard as the finest English version of said texts- the King James. This companion release is related to the original inasmuch as

'...these source sounds, in conjunction with the original concept, were open to so many different interpretations that they were then sent to a number of artists to create their own music. Some of the artists used nothing but the source sounds; some in a very minimal way, others in a more complex manner. Others used the sounds as a starting point to build their own music around, so that the samples became an integral part of their own particular vision.'

And that's what *Rewriting The Book* consists of- the results of some twenty-three experiments in cooking the raw sonic paper, in curing (or worsening) the nasty case of bibliophobia that Akifumi is evincing in his desire to reduce the King James Bible to the lowly status of a blow-up fuckdoll that can be pummelled and shredded (er, so I'm told). I mean, why not use the phonebook? There's a yawning chasm between where my head's at and wherever it is that the division between message and medium can get so blurred and lazy that it's used as a smokescreen for justifying the growing obesity of the million-headed artwank hydra that writhes inexorably over dead -isms while sporting a 'No Future' T-shirt; that chasm is called 'Conceptual Art'; I would genuinely love to bridge the chasm somehow and find myself in a brightly-coloured, friendly place where nobody needed symbolism any more 'cos they'd outgrown it; maybe this CD is going

to take me there. Do you want to go there? Maybe you already live
there. I still think you'd need psychotherapy to endure this music at its full stretch, or if you're into machismo in a big way at least have a friend or two you can call after CD1 has ended- he/she might help to talk you down, help you decide whether to go for CD2 or to go away for a short break somewhere quiet, with trees.

OK, warnings aside, there's good and bad here in abundance, as you'd expect with something that crosses national and generic boundaries with such fleet transcendentalism. Although having said that, am I alone in feeling dismay at the homogeneity of so much contemporary electronica? Mille Plateaux et al, well I confess I'm a rank amateur in the field (but don't forget the Zen masters and their regard for 'beginners' mind')- somehow the whole ethos feels sterile. Happily, this collection is a good deal more catholic than the above remarks might imply, featuring all sorts from Merzbow to UK experimentalists Volcano the Bear, plus a whole bunch of crazy iconoclasts I've never heard of. One very important point I feel I must make- which is perhaps the axis around which I'm spinning my drivel- is that the least interesting and most irritatingly monotonous thing about all the tracks is the sound of rustling paper, which intrudes, predictably after a while, into ambiences that really don't need it, like a guilty conscience or a lost hard-on. '*Oy vey*', I found myself sobbing as yet again I was reminded of the don't-you-dare-laugh preciousness that the entire unlikely enterprise had been predicated upon, like a tower of playing-cards balancing precipitously on a stuffed fish. …'Not the paper noises again- how grave my sins that I should be punished so!'



It's difficult to give a track-by-track breakdown- my nervous breakdown was preoccupying me I'm afraid- and my CD player seemed to read more tracks per CD than the tracklisting indicated, so it was often hard to know when one thing stopped and another began. CD1, track 1- my notes inform me it's 'toilet music'. Track 2- ambient dub breastfeeding. Track 3- pulses of quacking electro lend the weather colours while ants construct vast columns of Lego. 5, mental illness. 6, tedious as a motorway (sorry, Kraftwerk). Track 7 was good, spitting and flaying; track 8 (which I believe to be Merzbow) demeans the listener's mother in the style of an orgasmic Edvard Munch. Track 9 sees us reach critical mass- an overload of beeps, scraping and vile flanges, it ricochets between what I could make out as five or six distinct terrors in the overall landscape of insane hell in a lightspeed journey that's fast, rough and totally inhuman, why it's *anti*human, a demon grinding its fists into your brain. After this, the rest of the CD passes in a blur.

CD2 rarely attains to this pitch of skullfucking euphoria. If you're gonna go there anyway, watch out for the electric eel attack on track 1; beware the sizzling chip fat within which almost every track is being deep-fried; track 3 wants to turn you into a werewolf, so do make sure you've a crossbow with silver-tipped arrows handy- and that your spouse/ friend/ mother isn't afraid to use it; by track 6 I was singing little songs in my head to keep up morale; track 10 and I've all but stopped listening to the noises emanating from my hi-fi speakers….I can hear the secret music of whispers and numbers coming out of the walls….

It's hard to know how to sum up the audioschizoid pleasures of *Rewriting The Book*. It's not an experience I can see myself repeating very often, nor am I in the least convinced that samples of ripping Bibles make a great foundation for anything other than a new Tower of Babel, which you'll remember from, uh, the Bible as being something like a gigantic man-made phallus stretching into the sky, symbolic of mankind's intellectual arrogance, which 'laughing-boy' Yahweh smashed to rubble, scattering the tribes and giving proto-humanity a bloody nose.

Oh, it's a giggle. Rome's on fire. Nero, make that fiddle sing!

JONATHAN HELLIER

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Wobbly

Playlist

USA ILLEGAL ART IA106 3" CD (ND)

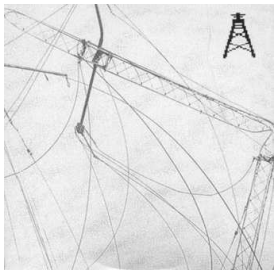
A joyfully sardonic little gem from Wobbly, who 'is his own self and brings out the best in all he endeavours to do as he spreads his talents out across the world like beautiful flowers', according to two clearly-smitten droogs profiling the artist for his website. Either smitten or perhaps part of Wobbly's scornful masterplan, dark rebarbative irony from the wicked incestuous uncle of comedy plunderphonics, another 'fuck you' from Art-Damage-Central-Command, swatting the lolling tongues of our bourgeois sentiment like wet red flies….no? Well no, actually- the man himself goes on to assert that 'when more people experience the euphoric ecstasy that could be obtained by sampling beautiful musical selections from rock to opera, more people will be less inclined to strife', and on the evidence of this twenty-minute chucklefest I'm inclined to take him, if not at face-value, then perhaps abdominally.

What we have here is a playful and humorous work comprised of radio samples all bitcrunched together into an internecine magic chunkbox of sharp-edged toysound, with corporate broadcast announcements reconfigured to display their smarmy fascist blandness in idiot loops; and the proverbial rollercoaster ride along AOR rushes and surges, orphaned from their natural pomp and hurled against one another as if in some deranged attempt at pulverisation. I suppose- were one so inclined- a case could be made for the satirical elements of such a project, and certainly we're being invited to laugh at the mannered conventions of FM radio broadcasting in much the same way as the work of Chris Morris subverted our responses to TV news programmes during the 1990s. But really it's more enjoyable to forget about poking fun at such soft targets and to climb down the taste-ladder into the cheese lagoon for a nice swim. Sleevenotes suggest that 'when listened to in shuffle play, the annoying conceptual framework of this disc vanishes entirely, leaving behind only the desired pop; advisable', which is rather cool. Certainly there's nobody beating us over the head with any Grand Statement here- we can unclench our geek-muscles and be frivolous.

At various points I was moved to try dancing, which in my case can only mean two things- either I'm listening to some stinkingly fungal Krautrock, or I believe I'm hearing the future of kiddie-pop music honour me with a sneak preview (in this case, the latter precondition applies!). There's something deeply erotic about dishevelled pop-noises waking up from the coma of orthodoxy and finding themselves reconfigured after Picasso- facial features askew and multiple breasts in fifth-dimensional clusters. It stops the Apollonic sunblinded sheen of pop becoming as narcissistic as it can do in situations lacking this vital element of decentralisation. This return of pop-power to fractures and schisms, away from the monomania of ugly perfection, is very sexy. And what's more, this is surely where it belongs- at the margins, where the propagandists cannot touch our moisture. Just listen to 'Worry Don't Thing', as it blows Stevie Wonder up like a balloon until he bursts, and blind genius trickles down the walls, freed from anything naff like persona. Or the awesome 'Christian Music' which movingly juxtaposes soulless electronica with Barry Manilow with exultant celebration of (you guessed it) Christian music. This track tastes of candy and blood, and if they built churches where you could smoke and watch porn, Wobbly's tribute to the Lord's pop might just see me born again, and again, and again.

Praise His name!

JONATHAN HELLIER



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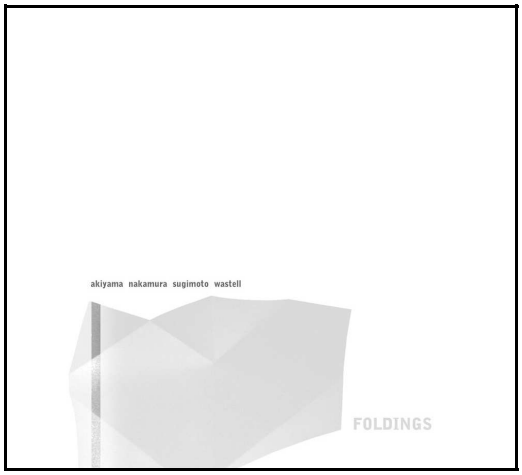
Mark Wastell



On 19th January 2001, the English cellist and improviser Mark Wastell was in Japan. He recorded some music with Tetuzi Akiyama, Toshi Nakamura and Taku Sugimoto during a successful session at Offsite, of which the results will soon be issued commercially as *Foldings* on the Confront label. He considered it a boon to join these Japanese players, all of whom are acknowledged as important players in this minimal style of quiet improv. Here, he explains how the gig came about and expounds at some length as to what he considers to be the importance of this radical improvising style, which (from where he's sitting) seems to be growing into an international movement, with key players not only in Tokyo, but emerging in Berlin, Vienna, London, Barcelona and parts of North America. In issue 9 we referred to this Japanese school of playing (that burst into the UK in the shape of the Japanorama tour) as 'Onkyo', a label which stuck since it was first used at a 1999 music festival in Vienna, but one whose provenance and usefulness some are now beginning to query. Like everyone else, we just find it handy to have labels for everything. Now read on.

Mark Wastell
Phone conversation with EP
27 October 2002

EP Can you tell me how the Offsite gig came about?

MW I was going to be in Tokyo for other reasons, basically visiting, a holiday. As I knew I was going, I got in touch with Taku [Sugimoto], whom I hadn't met before, I only knew him through his recordings. I tracked him down and asked about the possibility of being able to play together. He said that he wasn't actually organising concerts at that time, he was taking some sort of sabbatical from organising gigs, so he passed my contact onto Toshi [Nakamura], and it was actually Toshi who eventually got in touch and arranged the concert. It's important to mention as a bit of background, that Taku didn't know my music, my material, I'd sent him an opening e-mail saying I will be in Tokyo, and I would love to do a concert if something could be sorted. So he, very politely, sent a message back: 'this of course is an option, but I have to admit I'm unfamiliar with your work.' I sent him some recordings. I guess he was quite guarded because of the nature of the way he plays, the same way I'm guarded ... you have to choose your collaborators with a considerable degree of care. Nobody really wants the music to fail, it is sensitive music, and quite obviously I could have turned up, as far as Taku was aware, with an excruciatingly loud amplified cello and been a very pro-active player, which of course would not have suited the way he plays. And vice-versa, really. But I honestly wouldn't have contacted Taku if I didn't think there was a positive musical meeting between us. Which doesn't really adhere to the true essence of, well, the old-school essence of improvised music, in so much as 'anybody should be able to, is entitled to, play with any other improviser'.

EP Yes, that's what Company Week was predicated on. Sometimes it worked...sometimes it didn't.

MW Exactly. That's the very intention behind Company and Derek's approach to choosing the participants, he doesn't want it to be 'easy'. I think maybe we've stumbled across a very important point with regard to what defines this new way of playing. There needs to be a perceived compatibility. The old-guard perception of improvised music is not going be the right way to proceed with this new way of playing.

EP Can you tell me more about Offsite? Is it just a performance venue or is it also a workshop?

MW Offsite is a small building with two floors. Performance space is downstairs. Dimension-wise, it's like a small front room in a way, but they also use this area downstairs as a gallery space, so there are pictures on display too. There's a small bar upstairs, and also a lounge area, and they have a display of CDs and books for sale. I don't think they were predominantly art books, might have been art and philosophy and music books and such, but needless to say they're in Japanese.

EP This space was founded by Toshi, wasn't it? Or am I thinking of Bar Aoyama?

MW That's right, Bar Aoyama preceded Offsite. I think Toshi and Taku and Tetuzi Akiyama, who's equally prominent in organising concerts in Tokyo, have used a number of venues in recent years, Bar Aoyama being one, which ran for possibly a year. Then they moved to Offsite. I do remember asking at the time how they'd come to find Offsite, but it's a bit vague now. I think it's more to do with the guy who actually runs the [space] - Atsuhiro Ito - he's been active on the Tokyo New Improvised music scene for a while. Possibly they were all friends before Offsite come into being, but I don't think Offsite itself is actually that old. Atsuhiro Ito found the space, and very soon afterwards Toshi and Tetuzi started organising concerts there. But in a short space of time it's become the focal point, the home of this type of improvised music in Tokyo.

EP There's this double CD out now from the French label A Bruit Secret. It seems to come across that these [musical pieces] are compositions, minimal compositions. It's more a kind of thriving workshop...

MW Most, if not all, of the younger generation of improvisers have played at Offsite or been involved in various projects that take place in and around the whole of the Offsite scene, as well as some of the more established players. I know Otomo [Yoshihide] has played there quite regularly over time. What can I say? It's a focal point. It seems to be - it seems to have taken on this mantle and a very positive place it is too. Workshop, rehearsal, performance, recording all take place at Offsite.

EP What about yourself. Would you say you had to learn a new discipline to work with these guys?

MW No, I'd been working with this kind of discipline for a long time prior to making the Japanese connection. It's an area of performance that I've been interested in since about 1998. So it wasn't something that I had to develop to play with the Japanese guys, certainly not.

EP So you've been an improviser for how long?

MW Since 1995. 1995 was when I started making public performances on the London scene, and such.

EP What turned you around to this simpler way of working?

MW One thing that attracts me to working in this way is the pulse of the

thing, the speed of it - or should I say the non-speed of it. It's activity that kind of unfolds, a much thought-out approach to performing improvised music together. As opposed to a very pro-active stream-of-consciousness way of playing. I'm much more into constructing a more even-paced and measured approach to improvised music. It's becoming a language that's quite pan-global now. A number of players are working with this kind of material throughout Europe. Japan has become very important in recent times. A few people are starting to work this way in America. So yes, it's a movement, one that's as fragmented as any other movement at any one moment in time. There's a general feeling which is pulling certain musicians together to play in this way. But it's not easy. At any one time, a new language, any kind of new discipline, musical or otherwise, is often going to be ridiculed. Not everyone's going to be into it. I'm also attracted to the precision of this discipline, the core elements. By that I mean I'd sooner say something in twelve concise minutes than overplay for forty-two mundane boring minutes. Certain record labels will habitually put 78 minutes on music on a CD, because - you can. Not because the music warrants it. The recent Absurd CD release I did with Matt Davis, that comes in at little over half an hour. We had stacks of other material recorded on that tour, but essentially it was only a variation on the same theme, because we were using much more reduced material and had a very limited set-up of electronic apparatus.

EP Can you say more about what you think are the distinctive properties of this music?

MW I think the nature of performance has changed with this kind of music. That's another thing that perhaps draws me to it. There's no showmanship involved, as opposed to other ways of playing improvised music. There are no soloistic passages, there's a very delicate layering of each other's material, in a very measured way - sorry to come back to that word! - of listening to one another, not necessarily feeling that you have to project something to the audience, and to the other performers. There's no forcing of material onto an audience or the other performers. It's much more evenly paced, and if this evenly-paced material encompasses large stretches or segments of non-sound or silence, then - with the performers that I play with - no-one is intimidated by this at all. The use of silence, that's attractive to me personally.

EP I'm glad you're being very polite and not naming names, when you talk about pro-active improvisers! I think I understand the school of thought you might be referring to.

MW I really don't want to set myself up as a pro-reductionist, and anti-everything else! As you know, I've just released a CD on the Sound 323 label, which is highly pro-active classic British improv - Simon Fell and Derek Bailey, it's fantastic. It has it's place. It's their language, developed through years of concentrated activity. I think as well, that younger performers are searching for their own voice within the context of improvised music, and, for a lot of them, playing in pre-prescribed way of XYZ Famous Improviser is not enough. People are searching for their own language - which is supposedly the essence of improvised music anyway, or one of the essences of it - to find your own language, and to make your own material. If that becomes part of a wider pan-global movement, which seems to be happening with this way of playing, then in some respects a new language is being formed. Now whether that new language sustains itself, whether people (myself included) are still working in this way in five years' time remains to be seen. Essentially the music changes all the time. So it could be very different, who knows, in five months' time? That will be the interesting thing, to see where this discipline goes next.

EP Yes, some good observations there. One other thing which I always observe about this kind of music is that it doesn't appear to be jazz-based. I'm not sure what it is based on, other than finding a personal voice, and the interaction...

MW There's no jazz reference, there's no classical reference. I say that as somebody who plays a classical instrument. One point is, I think it's a music that's informed by digital ears. A lot of the players are listening to forms of music that didn't even exist ten years ago.

EP What do you mean by digital ears?

MW Digital ears, as in the post-electronica scene, post-techno, post-digital musique concrète...our experiences are going to be very different to the generation of improvisers that were predominantly influenced by free jazz, for argument's sake. I'm listening to Bernhard Günter and Francisco López, to sound art...that's an important source of reference for me. Constructors of musical matter. Dance is important for me, I'm very much into Butoh dance and that discipline, so that's an interesting aspect, something I draw a correlation to with the way I play. Sculpture, as well. I do take some influence from very still art. Pictures, visual art that is quite still, whether it be sculpture, the paintings of Robert Ryman...in a way this has just come to me in this conversation, really. To see a lot of this music played, you've got people sitting behind table tops with electronics or behind an instrument, and just because of the nature of the way this music's performed, it can be very still. It can be very much like Butoh dance - the smallest gesture speaks volumes. Which is what that dance discipline is all about. That might be a nice point to explore.

EP What other painters and visual artists have inspired you in that way?

MW For me, going right through John Latham, Patrick Heron, Kline, Motherwell I guess to a certain point. All the great post-Pollock [painters]. Rothko yes, but probably less so than somebody like Robert Ryman. But Rothko's way up the list!

EP You've answered one of my other questions, when I hoped you'd give your opinion on the importance of this kind of music within the context of improvisation. You say you've met Taku the guitarist. He rarely ever talks about his music.

MW Yes, absolutely. It would seem he lets his work speak for him. I like this...actions speak louder than words. It's also interesting how Taku's work has changed, as well. If you go back to his earlier recordings from 1995, 1996...these things were much more pro-active and noisier. It's interesting how a lot of the people who have come together to create this new movement were playing very differently five or six years ago. I guess the bigger question is why have a certain a number of performers begun investigating ways of playing quieter, reduced, rarified material in recent years? I guess everybody would have a different answer, naturally they would.

EP Can you think of some names, anyone else you'd include in this pan-global gathering?

MW Yes, sure. Other Europeans...other people that I've worked closely with, I have to mention Burkhard Beins because he's somebody I've worked closely with since 1998 in varying projects over the years. He was quite influential because we met at the right time, in 1998, just when my material was perhaps on the turn and was needing to go in a certain direction. So the meeting with Burkhard was very important. I've been working with Rhodri Davies as well, he's my closest musical partner in the UK. Matt Davis is somebody else I have to mention from London, a trumpet and electronics player. And also Phil Durrant has been very influential over the years, a mentor. Further afield, there's a very nice trio of players in Barcelona: Alfredo Cost Monteiro, who plays accordion and electronics, he works in this way. Ferran Fages, he works with electronics, and Ruth Barberia. She's a trumpet player, and they're a little nucleus, a little cell in Barcelona. Who else do we have? I've not played with any American players in this way, but I suppose you would have to think of Greg Kelley and Bhob Rainey in this area. I think this kind of music has just taken hold in the US. It hasn't made quite a grip so far, but I certainly think it's on the turn there, and very much reflected in certain records that are coming out now and certain labels that are championing the cause. Erstwhile Records would be a prime example from the US, and A Bruit Secret in France. And the Rossbin label in Italy. I've got a CD coming out on Rossbin in a couple of weeks. It's a sound-conscious quartet of Rhodri, Phil Durrant and myself and Chris Burn. Needless to say other people are part and parcel of this scene. I mean the Berlin players, of course:- Axel [Dörner] and Andrea Neumann, Annette Krebs, Michael Renkel. Taku Unami from Tokyo has impressed me greatly in recent times too. On a worldwide platform, there's hardly more than 30 people working this way, 30-40 musicians I would roughly guess, who are resolutely working with this kind of material. Which is not to say that others aren't performing other musics as well as working with a more reductionist language. I have to mention the Austrians as well - Radu Malfatti, Werner Dafeldecker and Christoph Kurzmann. I know less about people like Burkhard Stangl and the Polwechsel set-up. But they would certainly fall into this category to my mind anyway. Of course, they might think something totally different!

EP Yes, I think this Erstwhile record they made with Christian Fennesz and John Butcher is interesting.

MW And all the cross-genre collaborations of, shall we say, techno guys with improvisers with video artists with strict instrumentalists...there's a lot of work going on at the moment. Although some of it gets written about in the music press, most of it goes unremarked, but it's taking place, it's all happening, and it's making for a very positive future in terms of 'improvised music'. Which needs to happen for the activity to live on. □

PUNX SYNTH

PRIMITIVE ELECTRO NOISE

The Digitariat

Guide Me In

UNITED KINGDOM TRICKED CD 001 CD-R (2002)

A ridiculously LOUD slab of aggressive, harsh and scratchy noise which has popped up from the UK electro-underground like a black toad leaping from a sewer manhole. Distorted power electronics, insane drum programmes, and plenty of horrendous electric yowls on the top - I guess this is what Alec Empire sounded like in the mid 1990s, though I never heard any records. Mostly instrumental, though two tracks feature 'total freak-out vocals' from main man Paul D Knowles - roaring and chanting like a lobotomised Mark E Smith. For sheer energy and attack, you can't beat it. And it's nothing like the power electronics of those inspired by Throbbing Gristle onwards - eg Grey Wolves or Putrefier, whose approaches are positively artistic next to the dumbed-down approach of Digitariat. Their noise celebrates the stupid, vacant chaos of modern push-button instant disposable culture...in their own words, 'The Digitariat responded to the spellbinding colourful tits-and-arse nonsense of music television and the nasty yelling and amateur mix and scratch of ten-a-penny pirate radio stations, wanting to take it, make it ours and spit it out as a raging fireball'. That's the spirit, lads.

This form of harsh, electro punk style of playing certainly has a chaotic charm, although I sometimes wish when they find a decent rhythm they would sustain it for a bit longer - but, impatient speed-crazy kids that they are, they can't wait to move onto the next big gestural kick and disrupt everything, destroying their own progress in a blaze of fiery attack. Machines are abused until they howl - these lads enjoy fiddling with their knobs, and I use the phrase advisedly, as cover art features a vile cartoon of a plateful of severed cocks, about to be shoved into a vagina-toaster and eaten by castrating women. Mark Stafford (known as a very derivative no-talent cartoonist who swipes blatantly from anything he can get his hands on) drew this puerile image, bolstering the band's boast of 'Bad attitude! Base preoccupations!' Yep, the package conveys raunchiness and griminess in equal amounts, and indeed you feel sullied as you listen, as though you'd been caught browsing among hard core porn mags in some sleazy Soho shop and the filth of it gets into your very fingerprints. Third entry in this combo's catalogue - previous ones were a 15-minute cassette of their first live performance, and a CD-R on Assemblage Point. Watch with interest, if you like this sort of thing...a promised longer release might serve them better.

ED PINSENT 02/11/2002

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The Experimental Makeup

Xprmntlmkp

USA SOUNDSOKAY SO1 CD-R (2000)

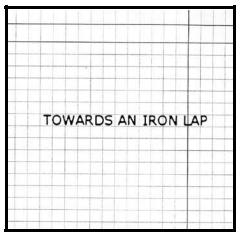
Iron Lap

Towards an Iron Lap

USA SOUNDSOKAY SO2 CD-R (2001)

Two solo records here by David Galbraith in NYC under different aliases. The Experimental Makeup record is a not-bad platter of home-made power electronics (with occasional songs and guitar work). Plenty of squonky rhythms, eccentric use of the beat-box, electronic white noise and choppy electric guitars. His slowed-down version of 'No Fun' - where he sings like a starving hyena with a bad hangover - brands him a fan of the Dr Mix and The Remix version, over The Stooges original...this brief set of 8 cuts, recorded in 1999 and 2000, has some promise and an aggressive delivery, but somehow it lacks real force. I prefer it when he nearly loses control in a soup of echo effects and one too many overdubs. Generally though, there isn't much to lift this above the average bedroom recording.

Towards An Iron Lap is much better, louder and ballsier - and really shows the snarling aggression this young man is capable of. The sequencers and beat-boxes have been dropped - this one is all done on primitive analogue synths - perhaps only a single instrument? - but played really LOUD, with bitter stabbing fingers, and no restraints on the angry emotive forces driving each performance. 'Uayeb', the first cut, is demented and vicious as two wasps fighting inside a rotten apple, while 'Yaxkin' is simply spastic, the player hammering the keys like a retarded kid wrecking his train set with a plastic hammer. Marvellously vile sounds pour out of the amplifier, like a great sea of sewage. 'Tzec', though more restrained, is just as effective and deadly, with a fairly long and obsessive exploration of textures and filtering, lie a starved rat relentlessly crawling along a sewer. Subtle, but still steeped in evil forces. In all a fine mini CD of deeply anti-social, edgy synth ranting....very focussed and effective in doling out the throbbing punches of noise.



ED PINSENT 18/11/2002

www.soundsokay.com

We're Breaking Up

Love Distance Endless Endless

UNITED KINGDOM TWOTHOUSANDAND 2++2 CD (2002)

Promising...I like the 'naive' approach to electronica exhibited by this player, by which I mean his determination not to be too 'clever'. No excess of tricky 'layers' which it's so easy to get with ProTools, no sampled breakbeats, but instead a disarmingly simple musical spread of basic elements - what I can only lamely describe as patterns, loops and rhythms. Further, there's no futile striving for novelty or radical 'new' sounds - in fact the sound is sometimes so familiar it's almost utilitarian. But there's a few clever stings in the tail, in the way the music keeps drawing you into a musical fiction or dreamland odyssey, only to throw you back to reality with frequent interruptions and disruptions of the surface. There's a lot of stark emotion on this record. A window in Dublin shows the message HELP written inside. Figures at a friend's wedding are rendered small and powerless in a desolate landscape. Using these few simple black and white sleeve photos, the central 'theme' of the music is laid bare - relationships and friendships always end miserably, and always leave you alone. 'We're breaking up' suggests a mobile phone conversation going wrong just as much as a love affair ending - indeed the music at times resembles dial tones, or somewhat more benign ring tones than we usually endure. I must stress this emotional resonance is achieved successfully, and without resorting to tricks such as dreary Ambient music clichés, minor chords, obvious 'sad' sounds, or other manipulative means of that ilk. Novel approach - and a very direct one, electronics from the heart. Michael Rodgers is an American ex-pat living in London just now. Played in punk bands in Memphis USA. But he is not a 'punk' synth player like the French guys of Tin.RP or Pita Rehberg when he's feeling seriously pissed off, although Rodgers can deliver a noisy dense roarage along with his more wistful sounds. An effective and honest work, one to use as soundtrack for along train journey back home after a disappointing weekend with friends, family or partner. Climb into the comfort zone offered by these raw electronics and dreamy drones.

ED PINSENT 28/10/2002

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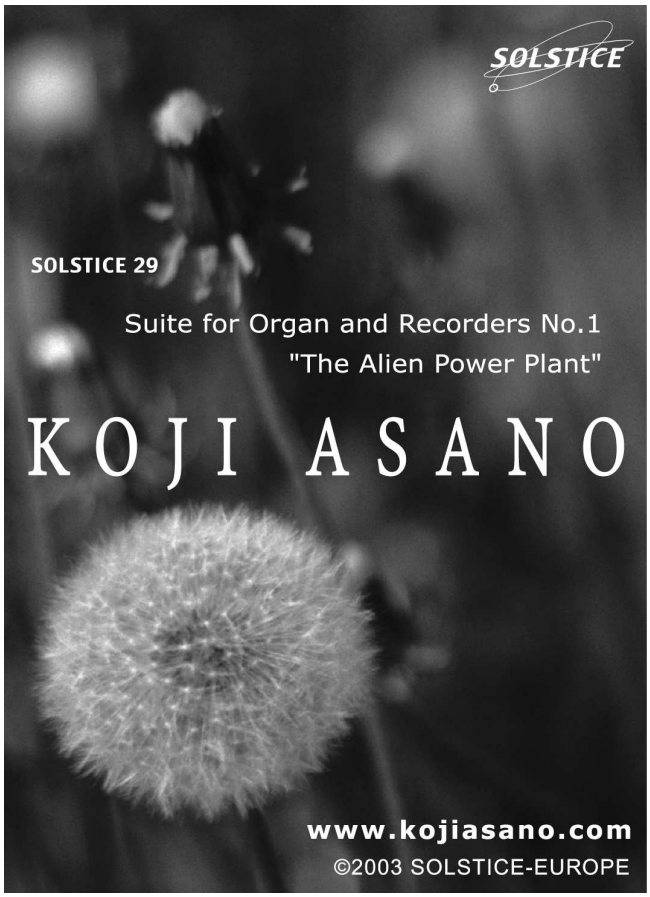

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My Laconic Lobsters

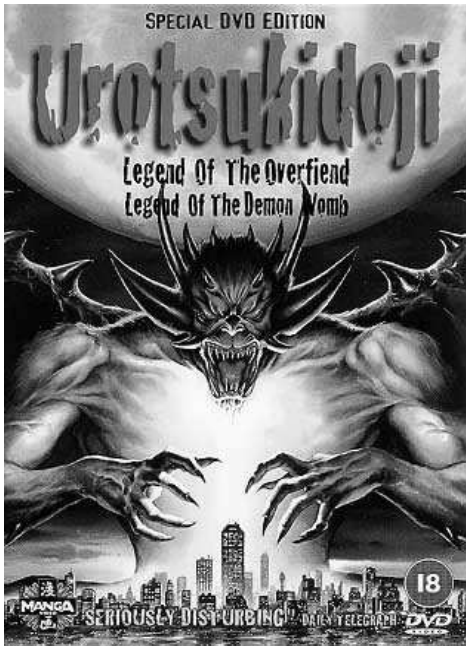
LIVE REVIEWS

Acid Mothers Temple

Live soundtrack to *Legend of the Overfiend*

Queen Elizabeth Hall London, 5th April 2002

If the last couple of years are anything to go by, live soundtracks to cult films are here to stay. They used to be rare events but someone must've decided that they're a good thing as it seems that every major season of events now has at least one such show in its schedule. In London alone we've just recently had Yo La Tengo scoring films by Jean Painlevé, Asian Dub Foundation scoring *La Haine*, as well as this pairing of flavour-of-the-moment Jap stoner collective, Acid Mothers Temple, with Hideki Takayam's X-rated animé flick *Urotsukidji (*aka *Legend of the Overfiend)*.



But putting live music to a film sometimes sounds better on paper than in the concert hall. At one Barbican event I remember being torn between gawping at a film of Henry Darger drawings and concentrating on the accompanying live Harry Partch music, both beautiful and individually deserving of complete attention, but neither fitting with the other. At *Legend of the Overfiend* we had the opposite problem - a film and a band fighting to be the most wearisome experience for the viewer/listener.

The story of *Legend of the Overfiend* (not, unfortunately, a lost Windsor McCay cartoon) seemed to involve alternative realities, humans as demon sex slaves, an impending apocalypse, and a 'Chosen One' (natch). I could be wrong though, as much of the dialogue was obliterated by the music and I guess the event was intended to be more of a psychedelic experience for the viewer than an opportunity to follow the film's storyline. What sticks in the mind is the various characters undergoing a never-ending parade of transformations... from human to demon to another nastier demon, to a demon with longer teeth than the previous demon, to a bunny rabbit, and back again, usually accompanied by psychedelic lightshow effects and increased noise-activity from AMT.

And the reason why this is 'X-Rated'? It's the nasty sexual content. Any body part that was by any stretch of the imagination phallic (teeth, tongue, arms, fingers) would at some point in the film turn into either a penis, or a tentacle attempting to perform the same function as a penis (and it's not the urinary one I'm talking about). Similarly, one orifice seemed as good as another for the perverted sex needs of the Overfiend's demons (mouth, vagina, ear, anus, eyes and wounds all fair game for a satanic shafting). These visual links aren't new (there's precendents in the art of Hans Bellmer and Savage Pencil for instance), neither are they particularly offensive, and I've since come across the term 'tentacle hentai' which suggests there's a whole lot more of this stuff out there. In this case it wasn't even the brutality that was off-putting, but the relentlessness of the whole experience, combined with the difficulty of engaging with any of the charmless characters or situations. Sex and violence aside, it was like being forced to watch six 20-minute-long japanese kids' cartoons in a row, and six particularly humourless ones at that. (In fact there were both tentacles and transformations in *Jackie Chan Adventures* on Saturday morning telly the following day). As it turns out, the film was compiled from the first three episodes of a series, *Urotsukidoji (The Wandering Kid)* - it may just have been slightly more bearable in chunks, but I have my doubts.

As for the accompanying music, well if nothing else, AMT's performance at least matched the tone of the film. What began promisingly as a beautiful upswelling of atmospheric noises swiftly degenerated into an interminably turgid mess and stayed that way for most of the remaining 110 minutes plus filmless encore. Since at the best of times the unapologetically-indulgent AMT straddle a line between thrilling noise and patience-testing noodling, they were on to a loser here right from the start with all the instruments mixed at the same level. Anything that might've provided listeners with some signposts to guide us through the murk just disappeared into the sludge of the sound, as the evening unfolded into a mammoth endurance session of one apocalyptic climax after another. And without having anything to play off against, Kawabata Makoto's top-of-the-neck guitar soloing just gets tiring after a while - I used to ask myself 'how many cats can be strangled in 110 minutes' and now I know. It's at times like this you suspect that Acid Mothers Temple are going to turn into the modern equivalent of Gong, a band you have to be stoned to like. The only respite came half-way through when they wheeled out the piece (featured on *Acid Mothers Temple & The Melting Paraiso U.F.O.*) which is built around what sounds like a fragment of a Bryan Adams riff, extended over 20 minutes or so - at least this left enough space in the sound for the band to drift into a beautiful and peaceful circular groove.

Given the Acid Mothers Temple's already legendary back catalogue, I was surprised at how much of what they played was familiar. It seems that as well as distilling their sprawling communal membership down to a core touring band of Kawabata Makoto (lead guitar), Hiroshi (guitar), Tsuyama Atsushi (bass and vocals), Cotton Casino (synth) and Koizumi Hajime (drums), they've also reduced their enormous repertoire to just a few live numbers. In fact the set was almost identical to that at their far superior Garage gig a few months prior, albeit rearranged and extended to loosely match the progression of the film.

Pairing an extreme Japanese band with an extreme Japanese film does seem like the sort of obvious and trite idea that could have been cooked up by the South Bank's marketing department. ('Coming soon - Daniel Johnston singing along to *The Postman Always Rings Twice'*). Or maybe Acid Mothers Temple were just intent on shocking our repressed middle class western asses

with some primo grade home grown culture. Whatever the motivation, the combined AMT / Overfiend experience saw off everyone I was with after about 30 minutes. They walked out not shocked but worn down, and I only made it to the end in order to write this review.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

Minit and Sue Harding

Live performance at the Brett Whiteley Studio

Surry Hills, Sydney, Australia, 27th July 2002 (Whatismusic? / Sonic Alchemy)

Lazing on a sunny winter afternoon is never so agreeable as when you can do it at one of these monthly Sonic Alchemy gigs at the Brett Whiteley Studio. The former home and atelier of a locally famous painter who all too soon met his Maker some time in the last couple of years, the BWS features a large gallery area displaying some of Whiteley's larger works and murals and is ideal for gatherings of a couple of hundred punters all keen on live fine improv. This particular July gig was also part of the Whatismusic? carnival which this year visited Canberra for possibly the first time in years as well as its usual haunts Sydney and Melbourne.

The first act Minit presented a minimalist 30-minute piece which unfortunately suffered from iffy sound quality (one of the loudspeakers was playing up) with some background buzz. The audience didn't seem too fazed judging by the number of people who sat or lay back on cushions on the floor with their eyes closed, their faces wearing the serene expressions of those on voyages of inner space created by the music. From the rapid scribblings I made during the performance, I shall attempt to describe something of the Minit experience as I heard it and my brain interpreted it:

✦ deep pulsing drone with a church organ buzz beneath

✦ gradual enveloping sound like an ocean engulfing you

✦ rain static

✦ pulsing more prominent, screechy texture develops, gets louder

✦ metal raindrops hit steel bar producing different tones

✦ pace quickens, roaring orchestra starts drowning out previous sounds

✦ rubber dream beating arrhythmically, distorts into screech

✦ drone ceases, sound now jumpy, sound loop starts

✦ new buzzing drone, wobbling echo texture

✦ pulsing engine + motor sequence, a flying saucer prepares for take-off, creaky wheel loop

✦ electric accordion

✦ walnut cracking on wood

✦ motorbike puttering as if at rest

✦ erratic trumpet sound

✦ soft rain

FINIS

Parts of the piece didn't agree with me (never liked roaring orchestras that drown everything out, tend to think of them as a cop-out when things are getting out of control) and Minit's control of the music's dynamics wasn't great due perhaps to the sound problem but the two musicians worked hard at their samplers and overall the music was pleasant if a bit on the sedate side. (But it was a Sunday afternoon.)

After a 10-minute break, Sue Harding set to work with her four Amiga PCs attached to four computer printers to produce a surprisingly varied opus of pleasing if piercing rhythms leading into a sequence of repetitive printing noises and knocking sounds, assisted by sampler accompaniment from one Minit person. There was a quiet phase followed by a motor idling sequence, then there was looped paper winding around the printing drum and the whole opus (20 minutes in all) ended with a series of knocking drum sounds. The artist often had her back to the audience as she crawled on the floor from one PC to the other, the PCs having been set up on the floor with the screens and keyboards facing the audience. The music demonstrated an excellent control of rhythm, the sound quality was good, there were quiet periods and loud periods, there was even melody of a sort - above all, the mood was joyful and I'm sure nearly everyone listening was as enthused as I was. It will be interesting to see where Harding takes this music: perhaps she will continue performing with other idiosyncratic artists like herself; perhaps she'll experiment with different PCs and build up an orchestra of office machines; the path taken by Matmos on their early albums may beckon; maybe Harding may be Australia's answer to Haco with her toys and baby instruments - who knows? We certainly need more of Harding's happy music whatever she decides to do.

JENNIFER HOR

Contact: Brett Whiteley Studio, www.brettwhiteley.org, for more information on Sonic Alchemy series

instal02: Brave New Music

The Arches Glasgow

Sunday 1st December 2002

Used to be that a Weegee, in search of some serious musicological kicks, would have to travel north for the evening, to the historic town of Stirling, and partake of the ritual pelt down to the station for the last train, as the faint sounds of the headliner's sine wave generator pulsed from on top of the hill. Now, for a second year, Glasgow is treated to a full day of big names from the rarified world of experimental music. And a very impressive and international line-up it is too, even with Ilpo Väisänen and Hanayo failing to show up. You know there's some heavyweights here when the warm-up act is Phill Niblock.

Tonight The Arches has been divided into a bar, a screening room (cinema even), and three performance spaces: one large seated area and two cavernous antechambers. In the darkest of these Niblock generates his deep warm and compelling hums and overtones, the high vaulted ceiling lending a reflective gothic air. Grounding the piece are two of Niblock's films, documentary footage of workers harvesting yams, mending nets and trading on market stalls. There's a screen at either end of the room so you can only watch one or the other, the audience is gently encouraged to mill about inside this cocoon of sound.

John Wall offers nothing to focus on except the man as he changes discs on a hi-fi. Not even CDRs prepared for the performance, or a preview of new material, but his already issued CDs that you can walk into a shop and buy yourself. His concession to showmanship is leaning back against the wall once the disc is playing. He could pay us the courtesy of playing it through a laptop and at least pretending to tweak the pots.

Carsten Nicolai, in his guise as alva.noto., presents his synesthetic display of 'Chip' contemporary graphics on mirror image video screens. Simple and seductive but, with the pallid techno soundtrack he's churning out, not able to hold the audience's interest for longer than a few minutes. He knows he can do better.

Sunday evening all-you-can-eat sushi beckons and we miss Koji Asano's composition for the Paragon Ensemble - a line up of cello, glockenspiels and contrabassoon, we hear good reports on our return. We missed the interplanetary ride of a lifetime, and we curse those last half dozen plates we ate just to get our moneys worth.

The cinema shows a selection of 'Mirrorball' videos twice. Not a very inspiring programme, except for Cornelius' *Drop*, an elegant and playful study of water droplets in sound and visuals. It strikes me that Keigo Oyamada's methodology is probably as precise and exacting as someone like John Wall, except there's an acoustic guitar and harmony vocals in the mix and he's perceived as a 'pop' musician.

Latecomers, and those of us with plenty of stamina, are treated

to a second set from Phil Niblock later in the evening, similar to the first and just as entrancing. In the cinema next door, they're screening one of his films, something remarkably similar to what's being produced in here and people are sitting watching it. It's not as overpoweringly loud and there's only one screen to concentrate on and you can sit down but even so... ? Niblock's celebrated Sun Ra documentary has been much anticipated but it's shown while most of us are in Arch 3 for what seems like the main event, a new piece from Ryoji Ikeda.

The pure crystalline perfection of Ikeda's +/- has become something of a bull collar around his neck, but he's managed to shift his territory. He's moved to denser ground. A monumental video that climaxes with a fast stream of numbers flowing over the beating waves of the sea is perfectly analogous to the overloaded build up of tones: a primal soup of information; mathematics battling nature. A thrilling contest for us grapple fans.

Stumbling out of the hall a little shellshocked, there's one final event for us. A gentle come down, albeit a slightly scary one, in the sacred space now vacated by Niblock. On entering, everyone is handed a blindfold and asked to find a place around the ramshackle tent erected for a performance by Francisco López. We are asked to blindfold ourselves and trust to López's goodwill. But who is he? Maybe one of these characters you've seen wandering

round looking like a disgraced former acolyte of Thee Temple of Psychic Youth? Will there be dead animals involved? I never see him but he orchestrates a fascinating environment of sound where the audience is unsure whether that was a huge bird swooping past the head or the person next to you getting up to leave.

The person next to me is getting up to leave and he's giving me a lift home so I'm going too. I expect I'll be back next year

MARC BAINES

Maher Shalal Hash Baz and Keiji Haino

Le Weekend Festival, Tolbooth Auditorium Stirling

29th April 2002

'He's extremely polite and has this amazing long hair which is in great condition for a guy of his age.'

Have you seen him without his dark glasses?

'No, he hasn't taken them off all day.'

So confides one of the stout folk who work at the Tolbooth Auditorium, revealing a behind the scenes glimpse of the carefully constructed enigma that is Keiji Haino.

'Some of his equipment hasn't arrived so we've no idea what he's going to be playing tonight.'

Keiji Haino is in Scotland to perform at Le Weekend, a mini-festival of avant rock and free jazz. The majority of the audience seem to have travelled from Glasgow on the same train. After a brief glimpse of the town I'm trying to visualise Keiji queueing in one of Stirling's fish & chip shops wearing his black leather trousers and pixie boots. It must take some conviction to maintain such an uncompromising image. I realise I'm perhaps not taking this seriously enough. Yet I've travelled much further than Glasgow to see the Japanese underground titan. Accounts of his first incendiary British shows of a few years back fired my imagination no end, like the heroic life stories of Catholic Saints on their pilgrimages of self-immolation. This is the fellow whose guitar strangulations made Blue Cheer sound like Gareth Gates. He helped to revive the wrinkly carcass of guitar rock by simply flaying it alive. He releases scores of CDs with obtusely long titles and unvarying monochrome covers. I have about five of them but somehow don't find myself rushing out to buy more. Perhaps there's only so much blackness you can take before it gets silly. Maybe our fickle western attention spans have too quickly grown used to how Keiji Haino sounds and looks and have moved onto the next fetish. Whatever the problem is I'm sitting in the Tolbooth in an ambivalent mood, like a believer who is wavering into agnosticism.

'Keiji Haino meditates for 24 hours before making a live performance.' – Le Weekend guide.

But first on the stage are Maher Shalal Hash Baz. I'd previously only heard a tape of them and hadn't even realised they were Japanese, let alone 'legends' who have been around since the 80s. The tape had sounded amateurish but clever, a bit like later Red Krayola. Apparently the founding members, Tori Kudo and Reiko Omura prefer to work with non-musicians 'to create a spontaneous music unburdened by any formal theory.' They're here tonight with about six younger non-musicians, including a pair of laptop operators who simply play back the audience's respectful applause. Tori directs proceedings when he's not plonking a grand piano or scratching a tiny, battery operated guitar. Reiko mutters the most tentative and shy singing possible when she's not coyly turning over the pages of an A2 art-pad displaying the song titles. Each piece is a cutesy faltering mess and none lasts for longer than a minute. It's like feeding tiny scraps of food on the end of a cocktail stick to a starving man. Maybe the venue's heating is faulty but I'm getting hot under the collar. Yet everyone seems to be lapping it up, snorting indulgently like parents at an exclusive kindergarten. Reiko plays a trumpet badly for about three seconds and then giggles. Sweat is trickling down my back. Another wacky song title on the art-pad. I'm trying to think about the Discharge tracks I'd downloaded the previous week. The laptop operators play back the audience's respectful applause. I need some cool air. Thankfully the house lights go on.

Perhaps Keiji Haino will play a set so intense and loud that the entire audience will combine into a huge lump of wafer-thin ham which will have to be carefully scraped off the back wall of the venue.

The stage now has a semi-circle of Marshall amplifiers, a chair, some kind of mixing desk and a bank of effects pedals. There is very little lighting, a strange twilight setting for a live performance. An entire pack of incense sticks uncoils grey smoke into our eyes. The hushed ritualistic stage set causes a flutter of excited expectation. I'm prepared to be re-converted.

We're informed Keiji will perform tonight as Aihiyo and while I'm trying to remember if this is his 'covers' project the man scampers onto the stage, clutching a shiny Gibson SG. He sits down, flicks the hair from his face, bashes out an angular guitar motif and flicks something on the desk which then repeats the sound. Over this he builds up a pulsing wall of metallic clanging through which you can sometimes discern a Keith Richards riff or a Phil Spector melody. Yes, Aihiyo is Keiji's covers project and while it is a surprisingly accessible show naturally it's not a set of karaoke versions. Keiji seems to be tapping into the heightened charge of seminal rock and blues songs and transforming them into an even more intense totality. 'Purple Haze' is dismantled, Hendrix's loose dynamic shot into distant corners of his own black universe. The show reminds me of rock music's primal power, its capability to break out of restrictive structures and into life affirming dimensions of noise. Somehow this also justifies Keiji's black rock uniform, and saves it from being a daft distraction. Keeping the faith, he looks probably not very different from when he first stepped onstage thirty years ago. And maybe he really does meditate for 24 hours before a live show because I've never seen a performer so intensely focussed on their task. Intensity has to be the key, because the heating is on too high yet we're all gripped by the little black-clad figure on the stage. Sweat is still trickling down my back. When Keiji Haino's energy is spent we climb the stairs to view Stirling's skyline, ears ringing happily.

Keiji Haino was unable to perform the following night as Fushitsusha. He contracted food poisoning from eating a cream-cake.

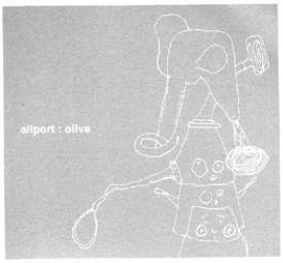
JOHN BAGNALL

minimal players

"QUIETER, REDUCED, RARIFIED MUSIC"

Allport : Olive

Allport : Olive
CANADA INFREQUENCY RECORDINGS NO NUMBER 3" CD (2002)



Another small and modest work from this Canadian duo. Their previous recordings have been reviewed in TSP where their unobtrusive presence was noted; now it's not so unobtrusive, but there's still an underlying determination by this pair to avoid making any sort of conventional musical sound. This strange rattling and poking escapade was realised using guitar and percussion (allegedly), but you'd never have guessed - apart from the slight ringing tone that results (probably accidentally) from the harmonics of the guitar strings, agitated into vibrating in spite of themselves by all the frenetic activity around them.

In fact, it probably wasn't that frenetic at all - but close-miking everything amplifies and enlarges, so that even a tiny gesture will show up on the finished tape and appear more deliberate - well, certainly more noticeable, anyway - than it actually was. Imagine an avant-garde movie of a body-art performance filmed using the best available Japanese telephoto lenses - and the director decided to concentrate on making a gigantic closeup of the performer's twitching eyebrow, so closely framed you can count every hair.

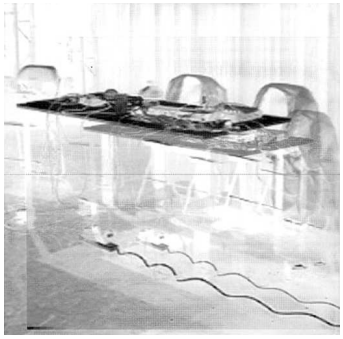
There is some discipline in reining in one's natural inclinations and restricting movement to this extremely limited range; and likewise in maintaining the same limitation to the production of utterly non-musical sounds. Clearly, the duo have to work themselves into a pretty focussed state to make a performance like this happen. I'm always surprised by how much there is to listen to, when it's so completely stripped of anything *except* gesture - all we have to listen to is the contact of gesture with objects, which now I come to think of it, sounds pretty tedious...potentially, a totally empty artistic statement could result. Luckily, this is short - I hope they stick to releasing mini-CDs. 72 minutes of this would drive you up the wall!

ED PINSENT 10/11/2002

1333 Lang Street, Victoria, BC, V8T 2S4, Canada
info@infrequency.ca
www.infrequency.ca

Matt Davis / Mark Wastell

Derby 11.05.2002 / Liverpool 10.05.2002
GREECE ABSURD #21
CD-R (2002)



Two greyish episodes of pure, austere sound-art from improvising cellist Mark Wastell and his partner Matt Davis, whose name is new to me. Table-top electronics is the chosen medium of this duo, but this is not quite Mille Plateaux styled click and cut austerity, nor is it the roaring noise of the Merzbow school. Displaying a clear interest in 'Onkyo' music and trente oiseaux silent records, the duo produce two extremely quiet, slow and largely imperceptible meditational pieces, performed live in Derby and Liverpool. Smoky plumes of high-pitched feedback whine into the ether, and Wastell's 'amplified textures' vie for attention with long silent pauses. In spite of the occasional bad-tempered snarl from a distortion device, this is largely an extremely non-eventful, washed-out experience. The clever treated photos on the cover play with the idea of the presence and absence of the musicians, who on occasion appear to have forgotten about the audience, turned off their machines and gone home...yet still their traces linger like smoky phantoms on the haunted stage. This is marginal, testing and difficult work; pure sound realised for its own sake, and nothing resembling a musical note on offer. A limited press release, 99 copies only, from this excellent Greek label.

ED PINSENT 17/11/2002

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Jean-Luc Guionnet

Pentes
FRANCE A BRUIT SECRET 07 CD (2002)

Divine collection of organ instrumentals played and improvised by French improviser Jean-Luc. These works have been specially recorded on a church organ at Notre Dame des Champs in Paris by Eric La Casa, the modern electro-acoustic genius and all-around good guy in the French avant-scene. The title *Pentes* simply means 'Slopes' or 'Gradients', a totally abstract word used here to describe the organ scales or the 'shapes' of the sounds he gradually creates with his keyboard droning; I had been angling in my usual illogical way to find some sort of a religious undercurrent in the music (Pentes being close to Pentecost in the dictionary), but I suspect there is none, even if Jean-Luc achieves the grandeur of famed Catholic composer and organist Olivier Messiaen on occasion. I think Jean-Luc's instrument of choice is usually the saxophone; I wondered if he needed training in how to manipulate the church organ, which can be quite a complex instrument to master, but maybe he just went at it headlong like a charging ram in the thicket. 'Cornement' is a series of rumbling and restless bass emanations, with wayward chord stabs thrown in on top like an array of sharp, tiny daggers. 'Registres' is built out of long dreamy tones and wheezing organ effects. Feels as though the player is completely lost in the middle of a dark, Germanic forest with the certainty of a wolf attack not far away. It has that fine sense of foreboding. 'Unda Maris' is totally minimal (or at least it develops into a one-note meditation eventually), with soaring long-form strange chords, pulled out of the instrument the same way an ill-trained doctor will determinedly pull out red hairy fibres from the legs of a man. It has the desired opiate effect; a troubled half-sleep will descend upon you, but your mind knows you must not succumb to the charms of this dangerous drug. With its brilliant improvised modulations of a single droning chord, this is the most sumptuous piece on offer. 'Récit et Tremblant' is spookier and uses many of the available organ effect to try and scare you (in the same way the church organ can contribute to the feelings of awe and fear in the trembling congregation), with its piping high notes piercing your brain like a shrill demented bat and wobbly effects to throw you off balance, making the entire pavement of the cathedral appear unstable. 'Portevent' is

more curious yet, a strange succession of random notes, the musician's fingers exploring their way around the map of an unknown landscape. In all, a delightful listen combining a range of difficult emotions within a rich and splendid sound. Nor is the organ's loud volume over-used; this is mostly a quiet record, in keeping with A Bruit Secret's catalogue of quiet and minimal music. Few players outside of Charlemagne Palestine have so convincingly demonstrated a mastery of this complex instrument inside a modern improvisational idiom.

ED PINSENT 23/11/2002

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MINI-INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-LUC GUIONNET

EP I'm sure this is all in my imagination, but this work is recorded on a church organ, and the title 'Pentes' - which in fact translates in English as 'Slopes' or 'Gradients' - made me think (through word association) of the Pentecost, a religious feast day in the church calendar. (We call it Whitsuntide). Do you feel any affinity with the work of Olivier Messiaen, a great French Catholic and composer, and his organ works? Is there any religious (or anti-religious) undercurrent to *Pentes*?

JLG The word 'Pentes' has for me something to do with time and space : once you are on a 'pente', you have to deal with a very physical problem : gravity. Then, either you have to work hard to stay where you are, and moreover to go 'up', or you have to accept the very specific tendency of time that space (pente) is setting, that's to say allow the weight of whatever you are to slide wherever it 'has to' slide. Both of the solutions are two positions (one's) 'body' is taking in the kind of time (in the duration) space imposes : a kind of effort. The organ is, for me, the space of the music to come : I've got to find and follow the 'pentes' it prescribes to be in the sound and not in my ideas (to meet the organ) - sort of spring, dash, impetus, abandon, moose ... given to whom is wanting it.

I guess it has something to do with a religious problem, but not specifically Catholic ! I like Olivier Messiaen, specially for his melodic approach, but he is not specifically targeted by my *pentes*...

EP Are you aware of Charlemagne Palestine and his church organ performances / recordings?

JLG I don't know those pieces, I just know a few records on piano which I like a lot (I also saw him in concert in Nantes).

EP I understand you're an improviser who mainly performs with the saxophone. Did you get any training to play the church organ - is it not quite a complex instrument, with all its stops, pedals and diapaisons?

JLG My first instrument (in order of time) is the piano which has nothing to do with organ ! but the keyboard etc ! ... for me (in my poor head) organ is an archaic and sophisticated mix between piano (keyboard), mixing table ('registres' - stops) and saxophone (pipes) which are the three instrumental accesses to sound I prefer...I did practice this instrument but less than on the saxophone or on the piano, and never in an academic way.

EP Is any of *Pentes* composed, or is it all improvised?

JLG All is absolutely and totally improvised.

EP Why choose the organ? Is it simply you like the sound it makes?

JLG It is the sound + 'the complex crossing' of life circumstances + a desire to use churches in my own way (I like sacred architecture) etc.

EP I think the record has a very profound effect, although what it is I don't know yet...the third track 'unda maris' is almost hallucinogenic, great modulations of a single droning chord.

JLG There is indeed only one eight-note chord there. A sort of very simple and schematic sound spectrum but with both minor and major third plus a way to detune some of the pitches and not the other, plus a way of playing on the 'registres' - stops : here is the technical part ! Concerning the hallucinogenic impression : that's exactly what I wanted 'unda maris' to do on the hearing brains, I'm thus happy to know it can work.

What I can say about it all is that for me music is a physical experience and that I try to put my brain in specific positions which set a certain kind of energy in the music going through bones, muscles, nerves, etc. I like to avoid the musical problem, to do music as if it wasn't music.

□□□□□□□□

Utah Kawasaki / Tetuzi Akiyama / Jason Kahn

Luwa

ITALY ROSSBIN RS002 CD (2002)

A fine disturbance in the neighbourhood is taking place. Japanese minimalists Utah Kawasaki and Tetuzi Akiyama take up the cudgels with American percussionist-electronicist Jason Kahn on this live recording captured in October 2000 in Zurich. A disturbance-mode record because not quite as outly minimo as other Rossbin releases or other records associated with these three - the noise is a splendid irritant, a presence as ticklish as the breadcrumbs in the rhinoceros skin of Rudyard Kipling. Utah's malfunctioning synthesiser, Tetuzi's guitar and electronics, and Kahn's bank of electronic gear all combine in a smirgling mixture, creating an aural sensation like being kissed by black barracuda and constricted by large snakes which having feet massaged with coarse pumice stones. After some 16 minutes from the start, Tetuzi decides he's going to 'play' his guitar - and his mongoloid approach to this activity has quite a notable effect on the other musicians. It takes matters in quite a different direction. Additional layers of throbbing accrue over time, a violent bass interruption looming in from zones unknown and hovering overhead like a menacing blimp, and the familiar clicks and buzzes floating like meaty chunks in the brew. The usual catalogue of elements perhaps, but a highly pleasing combination of them. Another 'discursive' creation, the noise trundles along endlessly down the corridors of your mind, swimming through very still spaces of sheer bliss, when there is no need whatsoever to disturb the potent spell.

ED PINSENT 25/11/2002

Via Gozzano 1, 10098 Rivoil (TO), Italy
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Greg Kelley

If I never meet you in this life, let me feel the lack

ITALY ROSSBIN RS006 CD (2002)

A fine solo turn from this American trumpet player, who has brought out his metallic pastry-cutter in duet ensembles also - last issue we reviewed his *Forlorn Green* and *Nmperign* CDs. Here, he might be suspected of emulating the great Axel Dörner, the Berlin trumpeter who made an astonishing solo record for A Bruit Secret in 2001. What they share is an interest in documenting their breathing as much as their playing. Kelley however eschews most recognised conventions of free improvisation and aims instead for pure minimalism.

On this sublime record, we float along to a sustained meditation on death and loneliness as evidenced by the poignant emotion within the title. A deep melancholy is conveyed by the longest section, which is placed near the end of the work and comprises a deep, low, loud drone like a wounded bear growling its last as it struggles to remove the steel trap from around its leg. Kelley sustains this droney section for a very long time, calling attention to the extreme duration. Up to this point we have been presented with an inventory of possible effects attainable on the trumpet, most of which (much like Dörner) are deliberately opposed to conventional note-shaping - instead, Kelley amplifies his own breathing, blowing and sucking, as lungfuls of oxygen unwind into the bowels of his tubular device; he also documents a slightly obscene gurgling reminiscent of a drain pipe. He mangles conventional trumpet-playing out of shape, and treats the action of making music as a sport akin to wrestling a python.

The work may superficially appear like a rather formless rambling through a catalogue of various embouchures and trumpet-blowing techniques. In between the long stretches of puff and drone, a shrill tootage or vulture-like shriek will escape his lips. I'm not entirely clear if any of these effects are achieved with the help of electronic devices, or whether he's using the edit facility in the studio to insert alarming interruptions. It may be he is skilled

enough to deliver all this 'live'. I rather suspect the CD has been carefully edited and assembled; it starts and ends with a second or two of a startling rattling noise, thus tipping the listener off to the simple structure which only reveals itself if you listen to the entire record.

ED PINSENT 21/10/2002

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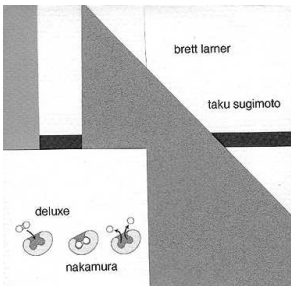

Brett Larner / Taku Sugimoto

Deluxe Nakamura

USA SPARKLING BEATNIK RECORDS SBR0028 CD (2002)

Another extremely 'difficult' Taku release, where he's partnered with koto player and guitarist Brett Larner, but also music that will genuinely reward the patient listener with ears of gold. Eventually, that is. You may find the payoff a long time coming. 'It has rapidly become one of my favourite albums,' writes Phil James of Sparkling Beatnik label. 'The music is very sparse...'

Erm - you *could* say that. Taku continues in his quest to pare down his already skeletal music into something yet more attenuated; already his earlier records (even those only a year or two older than this) now sound as lush and rich as a Turkish carpet in comparison. The music's been taken to pieces, lying on the hardwood floor like so many spare parts for a piece of tubular furniture, yet it's also totally cohesive and unified. These instrumental passages of extremely long duration - 'Nakamura Wonderland 1' lasts a full thirty minutes - are filled with sad, staring music, something it's impossible to tear away your attention from.

Brett Larner plays the acoustic guitar, the koto, the bi-dama, and what are cryptically referred to as 'small objects'. Taku, he too plays the acoustic guitar and likewise lays his fingers on the 'small objects'. Judging from what little we hear, these could be anything ranging from three pebbles to a bag of boiled sweets. Tim Olive and his buddy Allport are probably in awe of records like this. Tiny, inaudible plucks and chimes leak out of the instruments' strings; the players exercise small and highly controlled movements, with the slow-moving discipline of an acrobat, to wring out the smallest possible sounds. Just think of how much of themselves the players have poured into this music..the intensity barely wavers, not even during the longest sessions.

This is not music created by people. It's the energy of nature, like rubber tapped from trees. Natural and raw, a mysterious liquid sap bled from stones, or an ever grander mythical essence extracted from the bulk of a mountain. Poured into a teacup like icy-cold mercury. Recorded in Japan in the year 2001 by Taku and / or Tetuzi Akiyama, and mixed by Toshimaru in his Setreset studio. Packaged in a gorgeous paper sleeve comprising folds and cut-outs, and designed by the artists themselves.

ED PINSENT 18/11/2002

www.sparklingbeatnik.com

Jason Lescalleet

Mattresslessness

SWITZERLAND CUT 008 CD (2002)

Passable, but not quite an electronic Havana cigar. We know this fellow from *Forlorn Green*, a good improv joint where he was pared with trumpeter Greg Kelley to great effect on that Erstwhile release. Numerous contributions to comps and collaborative projects later, here be Jason's first solo work. It is pretty intense in places - he wants to position himself in the twilight zone between improvised music and sound art, although from the evidence here, his feet are firmly planted in the latter of those 2 camps. His opening salvo 'Ambidextrous and half Japanese' is his strongest statement here; its extended 11-minute length allows him to grind his ideas into the ground in an effective, primitive fashion. Hypnotic mesmeric dronework improves on the ambient / tape loop formula and manages to genuinely explore a strange unknown dimension of the mind; working only with crunchy lumps of dried porridge and stale pats of animal dung, Lescalleet carves dark and foreboding landscapes and dredges up thoughts you had hoped were buried long ago. He also makes effective use of unbearable tones - either so high they make your ears ring (at the start) or so low they cause your blood to clot (at the end). Some power.

Rest of disc limps on with five also-rans. 'Underscore' is simple crunchy static - the sort of metallic nonsense you could use to clean your windows, placed in rhythmic patterns. 'Clay Tapes', an enigmatic episode, is somewhat more hopeful; perhaps a process piece for tape recorders which leap into life at unexpected times, inside a large container of silence. But too much formless inert grinding results. 'Straight no chaser' uses a jazz title ironically to mask a fairly strong noise track - helicopter buzz and metal blades a-whirling and additional mechanical chatter. A fine irritant, but somehow not quite angry enough - the sucker punch lacks force. The 5th track has a silly title and is reasonably evocative - found tapes perhaps? Keening notes leak out like fragments from a sampled orchestra, again arranged in simplistic patterns. Overall, in spite of a strong opener, this is a pretty soulless outing with too much reliance on simple process-systems art, allowing the programmes to unfold and not saying very much with them. Lescalleet also namechecks (in his title dedications) a lot of contemporary talents whose circuits he is not yet worthy to wire.

ED PINSENT 24/12/2002

www.cut.fm

Toshimaru Nakamura / Sachiko M

do

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS ERSTWHILE 013 CD (2001)

It's astonishing how much sound and variety of sound Toshimaru Nakamura extracts from his apparently 'empty' mixing desk. These recordings in collaboration with Sachiko M the mistress of the equally 'empty' sine wave sampler are riveting in the way they evolve and develop despite (or perhaps because of) their severe minimalism and despite the length of one of the tracks (about 37 minutes). The long track 'do #1' is always steady with Sachiko M more or less maintaining a constant, even at times relentless, drone while Nakamura sets up his sequences of tones around it; the piece seems quiet though it must have been fairly loud at the time of its recording - this is the paradox of this 'quiet' music. The sine wave drone cuts through the air with the fineness of a samurai sword and chains of tones murmur or float in its wake like chains of amino acids travelling through cytoplasm towards their ultimate goal of forming a new DNA helix.

By contrast, 'do #2' is a short and fragile piece in which a sort of rhythm can be discerned but only very briefly. 'do #3' at over 10 minutes is about right in length (I sound a bit as though I'm retelling the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears) with a more substantial sound and a definite rhythm pulsing away. This piece qualifies as the most 'accessible' and the 'busiest' track on the CD though it still demands an attentive ear on the listener's part.

After hearing *do*, you realise that not only do the 'empty' mixing desk and the 'empty' sampler make a lot of noise together when the right people are in control, these 'instruments' complement each other well: the sampler drone holds the mixing desk's tones together and the mixing desk itself provides a counterpoint to the sampler's piercing if mostly unvarying sound.
JENNIFER HOR

www.erstwhilerecords.com

Andrea Neumann

Innenklavier

FRANCE A BRUIT SECRET 06 3" CD (2002)

German sound artist Andrea Neumann climbs right 'inside' her piano for this piece of soundwork. She plucks the piano strings, or scrapes objects against them, and with the help of a mixing desk generates some of the most tedious playing ever committed to tape. Track one is long, resounding tones; track two an indigestible mess of crackles and groans; track three documents a metal object being applied to the strings. The music is more than simply static, it's frozen solid; a neutered organism, resulting in a rather cold and tedious process art. For a much more interesting Neumann, check out her collaboration with Toshimari Nakamura.

ED PINSENT 26/10/2002

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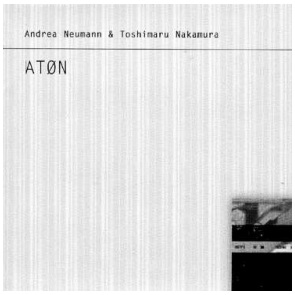
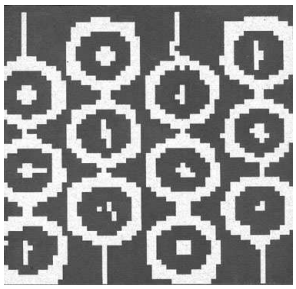
Andrea Neumann and Toshimaru Nakamura

Atøn

ITALY ROSSBIN RS001 CD (2002)



One of the latest reports back from the 'bleeding edge' of this strain of minimal improv 'reductionist' music - showing how it is developing - already the 'Onkyo' label, if assumed exclusively to describe the activities of a handful of talented Japanese players, is becoming redundant. We see further flowering and more Europeans adding their strength to the pool of muscle. This release was recorded in 2000, and more contributions are being manifested constantly. And it's the first release on this very good Rossbin label in Italy.



Andrea Neumann, is a German electronicist and an athletic climber inside her own grand piano (see elsewhere), an instrument she has studied classically since she was six years old. She now jimmies it up with Toshimaru Nakamura, the lord of all feedback he surveys. Toshi has been visiting Berlin frequently since 1994, laying waste to the town centre with waves of overloaded amplifier energy. His mysterious rendezvous with Neumann, recorded in Berlin with the help of goodman Axel Dörner, is modestly described as 'six sonic events [which] happened around Andrea and Toshi.' As if they weren't even lifting a finger. 'Don't blame us,' they say, 'we were just happened to be there at the time.' It is perhaps a measure of how little intervention is needed to create music of this sort, yet still it exhibits a muscular strength.

Strength, but a gentle power emanates from silver disc in CD player. Indeed we seem to be hearing something transmitted from a private zone, strange events happening in another dimension, barely recognisable as music performed in real space and time as we are given to understand it. So many small and indiscernible sounds forming pockets of electric air, a crackling ether. Said disc unspools and builds up continuous x-ray bombardments and feedback hangs like a blue mist in the air. Coded radio messages, signals from space. Atomic sounds snapped into smaller fragments on the microscopic altar. Clinking of tiny dinner plates at the picnic among the microbes. Repetitions and loops slowly piece together the cell structure.

If you'd told me this record was actually an aural document of a life-support machine in the corner of a hospital, I'd not be surprised; in fact I think I hear the patient 'flat-lining' just now. If indeed we have sonic events apparently happening with the artists as innocent bystanders, this may beg questions about the nature of what we understand as performed music. In fact, the artists are more necessary to the process than ever. To frame and define the event, as much as assist in its construction.

ED PINSENT 27/10/2002

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Repeat

Pool

SWITZERLAND CUT 009 CD (2002)

Toshimaru Nakamura and Jason Kahn return with their best release yet. A core of utter stillness at the centre of it; immobile music, emanated by musicians with a real fixation - a fixation on zero movement. Minimal tones, and ultra-minimal tones. The latest dare-devil dancing on a tightrope escapade from the bleeding edge of zero-music. A palpable calming effect on the human spirit can be discerned; train your mind to stop thinking, train your body to stop moving. Transcendent happiness will result.

Composed from no-input mixing board feedbacks of Toshi, and percussion and electronics from Kahn, expatriate American living in Zurich. Kahn is now a one-man art, music and record-label factory. He wraps this in an attractive abstract sleeve of his design, screenprinted on heavy cardboard in bright vermillion, and not far from a Homer Flynn / Pornographics image. The ninth release on Cut, and the fourth by Repeat. A long and sustained electronic dream, segued into episodes. Toshimaru is already reigning king of his empire of feedback; Kahn has now firmly established an identity of his own, a voice. The two voices together can move mountains, and vibrate walls apart.

ED PINSENT 19/11/2002

www.cut.fm

SSSD

Home

GERMANY GROB 431 CD (2002)

More first-class minima-improv musicianship, this time released on the 'happening' Grob label and featuring the great Taku Sugimoto, joining the two Viennese players Burkhard Stangl and Werner Dafekdecker and a fourth kangaroo, Martin Siewert, whom I know not. It's a mighty guitarfest of an ilk not seen or heard since the great days of Crosby , Stills, Nash and Young - 3 electric or acoustics plus some admirable bass guitar / double bass support from Werner D., hence overall a very *clear* sound which I suppose we can attribute to the precision of the spot-on studio recording but also to the measured clarity of the playing, in particular when they eschew any amp-fed distortion and remain all-acoustic. At first spin, this collection of seven slow-moving tracks seemed to me a little ill-formed and rambling, but today at loud volume it's completely 'on' - you could sharpen a box of pencils on the taut, sharp sound. As an album, it's not quite as totally pared-down as anything you might expect from the no-prisoners Japanese school, since more of the available space is filled with fancy fretwork - now and again we hear some fingerpicker who can't resist adding the odd clever effect. But they perform very slowly, the set has a lot of warmth (in spite of snowbound lodge pictures on sleeve) and a satisfying tonality. On the second cut they 'do it' over an organ drone (there are some very spare electronics on the set - which shows you can't keep an old Viennese laptopper down), a track which is compared to Pink Floyd and indeed comes very close to progressive rock or something as wonderfully sluggish as Ash Ra Tempel. The third track gets grindier, though - a whirring tone reminds you of the famous Keith Rowe hand-held fan on the strings effect, and combines nicely with odd clanging and crackling. Adding a bass to the quartet was a fab idea - sounds obvious if you think of, say, an acoustic jazz quartet, but here the bass really adds an ultra-solid dimensional presence that underpins the lighter filigree and chiming work of the three sting-ticklers. You'll hear exactly what I mean when you play this one fine day and your teeth commence to rattlin'.

ED PINSENT 17/11/2002

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Various Artists

Off Site Composed Music Series in 2001

FRANCE A BRUIT SECRET 101/102 2 x CD (2002)

From the Off Site Composed Music Series, an event organised by guitarist Taku Sugimoto in 2001, via Michel Henritzi's label, comes this frankly awesome double-CD set of minimal musical masterpieces...and lots of gaps and silences too. Taku was not only the organiser but he also recorded the events, as well as contributing as a musician of course, and he provides the liner note - a brief, pithy statement of clear intent that underpins this enterprise. 'Is it possible to improvise?' he asks. 'How to do it?' In fact, each piece here is reckoned as a composition, not strictly an improvisation, and credited to a composer (or composers) - even when in some cases the musician plays their own work, eg 'Hinge' by guitarist Burkhard Stangl, and is by default deemed to be composing as he/she plays.

But if we think of the personalities involved and the works they have created in the past, this composed-improv method makes perfect sense...Toshimaru Nakamura (the guitarist and feedback controller) composing a piece for the alto sax of Masahiko Okura. Of course. Taku S composing for turntable and sinewaves. Sachiko M composing for the accordion. Imagine them feeding their highly distinctive and personal methods through instruments different to those they normally play, working with the voices of other players. The results are wholly successful, and absolutely fascinating. 'We are possible to improvise a composed piece even if everything is looking fixed there' states Taku. 'Accept all the space'. He speaks of liberation, shaking off the chains, nothing fixed. Only lots of space to explore.

The first disc opens with Otomo's 'Portable Orchestra' - a sure crowd pleaser of an opening, with a dozen young Japanese players playing door buzzers, mobile phones, electric drills and many other household appliances. Thereafter three acoustic guitar pieces, each equally contemplative and still. The 'Big Saxophone' piece by Masahiko is lonely and lost. 'Two Of Them' is the Taku composition for the turntable of Tetuzi Akiyama and the sinewaves of Sachiko M - high tones and imperceptible creaks, huge gaps of quietness and unpredictable interventions - a real high spot of the record. Hmm! Even the electronic can seem acoustic within this context, somehow. Clean, tidy, open and simple - the volume of space spreads before us. More things are clearly possible. Less mental baggage, no clutter, and you can move in any direction, including upwards into the sky.

The second disc contains seven yet more abstruse and far-out experiments - starting with 'Paper Paper', three players rustling contact-miked pieces of paper. An Origami lesson changed into music; also isn't it part of the Japanese culture to wrap every single shop purchase in a piece of attractive paper, making everything into a 'gift'? Also three amazing radio based experiments here, including 'The Encyclopaedia of the Hong Kong foods' a remarkable composition by Otomo performed by the voice and radio set of Tetuzi Akiyama. Pure poetry...and there are some extremely short tracks of resplendent beauty, like Scahiko's 'Jyu ban Giri' that sparkles intensely for a moment, then vanishes. Last of all is the amazing 'Punkt', a Taku composition for the acoustic guitar played with careful slowness by Otomo. Utterly delicious.

OK, so we're talking a small and maybe even slightly incestuous scene of friends, trading ideas with each other. So what? You could have said the same of Company Week. You could even - no blasphemy intended - say the same of the mighty AMM or MEV. But there are things going on that can change the culture. Through the simple act of making an agreement, a compact, before you start playing, some amazing music results. How many improvisers have dared to exchange compositional ideas to this degree? The usual method is to perform first, ask questions later - get your balls on display on stage while you can.

Conversely, here is a real act of friendship, genuinely getting *into* each other's music, like injecting good infections in the bloodstream, performing the act of love, an exchange of bodily fluids. What power results. We can all learn a lot from this intimacy and compassion. Daring to share, to lower your shields, to lose your ego in a truly creative act. The benefits to the music are clear and obvious - this is already streets ahead of the Bar Aoyama recordings, which even so represented music so great that it seemed impossible to improve upon. It seemed slightly marginal then; but now we have something far stronger, and more meaningful, poised to become a new way of working in music. It might change lives.

ED PINSENT 09/11/2002

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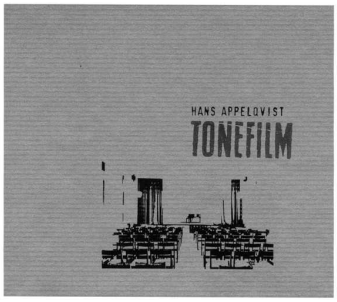
SOUND ART

Conceptual Ear-Artists Build Walls of grey Styrofoam for the hard of hearing, but what is their reward?



Hans Appelqvist

Tonefilm

SWEDEN KOMPLOTT ESCUDRE01 CD (2002)

More tasteful than a minimalist screen-print on the wall of an upmarket coffee bar. Perfect for Channel 4 to use as a soundtrack for a travel piece on summertime in Sweden. You've guessed it, *Tonefilm* is a highly mellow CD, with no jarring or agitated moments to snap the lulled listener out of a torpid reverie.

But, hey, mellowness needn't be a crime and when you actually observe the components that young Hans is working with a creeping admiration may set in. Sure, there are some reticent electronic beats here, but generally ambient clichés are avoided. Most of the dominant sounds are refreshingly acoustic: finger picked guitar chords, jangly up-right piano loops and here's where the film references come in, the attractive whirring sound of an old movie projector and snatches of Swedish celluloid dialogue. Each of the ten tracks quietly shuffle these ingredients about in different, sensitively chosen ways. The ambience is undeniably nostalgic, harking back to the earlier days of cinema, before it all got too noisy and epic. Hans Appelqvist's stage performances apparently pursue the cinematic / musical connection further by using outmoded props like portable gramophones, the aforementioned flickering projector and synchronised film/video clips. He even wears full evening suit when performing. Aren't we Europeans civilized? I'm guessing this live context would be the place to get the full *Tonefilm* experience and bearing this in mind have resisted using the word 'lightweight.'

JOHN BAGNALL.

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www.komplott.com

M Behrens

Selected Minimal Concerns

GREECE ABSURD CDR # 17 CD-R (2002)

Nothing Music of the very highest order. This man Behrens and his work are, I confess, new to me this issue, but it's clear he's a blazing maestro in his chosen field of micro-digital and granular explorations. His 'tree concerto' on the Portugese Sirr label (also in this issue) is a real killer album, and the ten cuts here are also notable as silent assassins which visit their victims in the night. This CD-R on the fine Absurd label based in Athens is a comp of earlier cuts by Behrens, mostly dating from 1990 and 1995. The first one, 'Intermatter', appeared on that now-legendary 1996 UK compilation of *Tres Speciale Nada Musico* entitled *A Fault In The Nothing*. At least, it has attained that mythical status for poor old me because I can't get a copy for amour nor moolah, and the highly principled MSC Harding of Ash International RIP will not repress or reissue a single scree from his redoubtable catalogue.

Roaring silentio and tense, textural fields of merino wool - all trademarks that single out Behrens as a singular creator very much at home on the Trente Oiseaux label, and indeed the grand vizier of that enterprise, Bernhard Günter (even he), is thanked on the credits here. On the strength of this CD Behrens is a specialist in complicated hoover noises, but his troublesome 'C64 Voice' from 1990 is a gibberish voice cut-up escapade, and unleashes madness that's guaranteed to lunarise your brain. The scrambling of language to this extreme degree may seem gratuitous, but it is necessary; a step in his grand project to liberate the world from the stupidity of common sense. The 'six metal samples' tracks (recorded in Darmstadt, on a day when Stockhausen was out of town) were realised with the help of sampler-operator Andreas K, and they're every bit as formidable as Test Department wearing steel dustbins and playing mumble-de-peg with the local thugs in a skateboard park. Yep, there's plenty of solid chunks of metallic noise rolling around in the compelling abstractoid hamster-wheel loops here. Alien harmonics and voices leap out from the metal sheets when they're scraped and bowed, a phenomenon now captured forever in digital mode. Conjuring real beauty out of the scrapheap (compare with This Heat and their metal tracks recorded in Cold Storage), Behrens forges white-hot sheets of sound.

The last two tracks are quieter and more puzzling, signifying the meandering musings of this mad magus as he sits in his study late at night, wearing a skullcap and devising many an elaborate theorem with which to influence the fates. Snakes of white lightning worm their way out of his brain, leaking strange effluvia. By the time of 'Untitled fdbk 95_2', he has assembled these thoughts into a coherent strategy and published them in a handy grimoire. Look out, world. By listening to these compacted ideas, compressed into usable packages of sound, you too will learn to think this way.

ED PINSENT 02/11/2002

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Alexei Borisov

Before the Evroremont

RUSSIA / FINLAND N&B RESEARCH DIGEST / AVANTO FESTIVAL NBRD-04 CD (2002)

Very curious sound assemblage work here, captured from a live performance at the Avanto Festival in November 2001 by this Russian obscurity. The method of delivery for this work by Borisov does not reveal itself from

listening alone -what you hear is a random collection of muffled, whimpering and slightly strangulated voices, pried loose from TV and radio broadcasts happening in the room next door. These voices rise like half-inflated balloons from a chattering noise, a blanket of strange static-drenched murk, generated by 'computer sound design, analogue synthesis, electric guitar and Soviet low tech and home-made electronics'. The piece sustains this indistinct murmuration for so long a duration that it induces a not-unpleasant feverish state, a bit like the disconnectedness and remoteness from normal life induced by a bad head cold or a bout of influenza. All the side effects of a disease in short, without actually being ill. Like a cloud of biological disease culture, *Before The Evroremont* lacks definition and shape, and is a gaseous form that hovers around you for a while then dissipates. One clue is that Borisov has spoken of 'the feelings of surrealistic chaos and psychedelic eclecticism so familiar to those who have spent time in Moscow.' He certainly succeeds in conveying that feeling.

Moscow's modern society is Borisov's target; there's a critical dimension to his work. The artist describes it as 'an audiovisual meditation on the processes taking place in everyday life and psychology in Russia'. Borisov is documenting a change discernible in Russian culture since the 1990s, as the traditional Moscow style has been cast aside, only to be replaced by a more bland Euro-centric approach. This is most evident in the choices that ordinary people make in interior decoration and furnishings. 'Most Muscovites throw out all their old furniture - or aspire to - and replace it with new 'European design', an imaginary 'typical European' and more rational style of interior decor,' says Borisov. 'This process has been named 'Evroremont' (literally 'Euro-repairs' or 'Euro-renovation').' To further illustrate this process, Borisov works with the Finnish photographer Anne Hämäläinen, who for several years has been documenting 'the vanishing Soviet-era aesthetics of suburbs and back yards'. Her photographs of interiors, furnishings, and garages were projected during the live performance of the work - and some are reproduced here as cover art. What's most striking is the pix of the utilitarian Russian garages - little more than rusty steel boxes with padlocks on the doors. It would indeed be a shame to have such distinctive things swept away, only to be replaced by identikit IKEA-styled furnishings. I think the political point being made is something to do with national identity, and its gradual loss through erosion. I'm assuming both artists regard this state of affairs as regrettable, to say the least. Both photos and music are steeped in melancholy, but they still focus on the subject unblinkingly.

Borisov has a respectable history of (presumably) oppositional musical activity in his homeland - guitarist of Centr in the early 1980s, the very first Russian new wave band, then a member of Notchnoi Prospeckt in the mid 1980s, a techno-industrial combo which has a cult following in Russia. In the 1990s he took an even more experimental turn, forming the duo F.R.U.I.T.S. with P Jagun, working with the Moscow art group Sever, and getting involved in multi-media projects such as Electric Future, Volga and Alternativa - all of which sound thrillingly bizarre. Co-founder of the N&B Research label Anton Nikkila, the Finnish electronicist, has been a partner since 1996. More power to them both.

ED PINSENT 02/11/2002

www.nbresearchdigest.com
www.avantofestival.com

Coelacanth

The Chronograph
USA PARTITION P|1 CD [2002]

A highly productive record of indistinct murmurs and brumblings captured live from unearthly happenings in the cityscape, performed by two magicians in search of hidden energies. This completely non-musical distort-oh rumblesence picks up the story from where id battery left off. And I for one am happy (that the story continues). id battery were Americans Loren Chasse and Brandon LaBelle - their work (solo or otherwise) has featured in TSP since issue three onwards. Brandon, though still qualified as a paid-up member of the Justice League of Avant-Maniacs, has since pursued a solo career and become a little flakey in my view. He took up an academic residency in London (not sure if he's still there), and has occasionally veered into pretentiousness in his recent slew of hit-or-miss releases. He continues to mine the same ideas of site-specific environmental work, and personal explorations of urban landscapes inspired by the dérive wanderings of Guy Debord. Where Labelle fails on the latter score is that he lacks the political fibre to make good, I suspect.

On the present release, Loren Chasse is joined by Jim Haynes, the all-rounder good guy from San Francisco who works at Aquarius Records, contributes a column of high weirdness to *The Wire* magazine, and is now associated with the 23FIVE record label devoted to strange and unusual noise. 'I rust things', is his motto - referring to his artworks, an example of which is inserted as an 'individually rusted cover' in this limited edition of 500 copies.

This release is a derivative from ambiguous sources...'unspecified public and private performances from 1999-2001' is the only clue the artistes will give us. Perhaps they think like Dave Knott and his secretive sound-sculpture[s] situated in diverse parts of Seattle, which can only be discovered through precise instructions which might allow passers-by to commit 'a lewd act of listening' (see his interview for further details). To Chasse and Haynes, I would surmise that the term 'performance' means something marginal and personal, perhaps making furtive visits at 4am to remote and forbidden zones of the city, to seek what inaccessible information they may. Perhaps the location has an untapped source of energy, lurking in an unlikely setting. Joseph Beuys, the great German ecological artist (and one of the few men who could have actually assisted the world to improve, if he'd been allowed to proceed) also believed in untapped energy sources. Except he would tend to focus on objects, not places; a photograph of one corner of his studio depicts a pile of Irish peat blocks he'd collected, one of many ungainly objects which he took to be psychic batteries, or metaphors of such batteries. I suppose the compacted peat blocks would slowly release heat when put on the fire. It takes a loony artist to see this as meaning something more than it is.

Elements, the laws of physics, the erratic behaviours of nature...all of these are observed by Haynes and Chasse, and discerned anew through the flapping ears of art. Determined to find poetry in the city, they end up documenting and magnifying invisible or unknown events, and translating them into the sonic richness herein. The first track 'A peculiar stone or the iron molecule' twitters for over 20 minutes in a relentless exploration of these very things, and is liable to hypnotise you into a trance. An additional 'distressed' surface to the recording adds an extra patina of art, like putting filters over the camera lens, thus distorting source material which might otherwise be just another environment record. But I like to think that despite all the feyness implied by the actions of these LA gonks, there is a mysterious magic at work here, a modern ritual performed with talismanic objects. They call this a chronograph, but it seems to be measuring something more than simply time passing. 'Method of extricating a live wire' is but one of their cryptic receipts for urban magic; 'How bodies become phosphorescent' is but one of the amazing results of their love-philtres. If you can get hold of a copy of this marginal rarity, you too may be transformed from a frog to a prince.

ED PINSENT 26/10/2002

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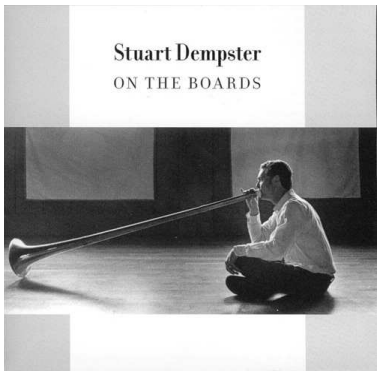
Stuart Dempster

On The Boards

USA ANOMALOUS RECORDS NOM 11 CD (2001)



When I say this is a CD of didgeridoo performances don't automatically think Rolf Harris or worse still, some neo-ethnic trippy accompaniment for middle class kids to roll their 'gear' to. Nope, the intention is artistic, academic even. As the sleeve notes point out, although the didjeridu (correct spelling) is originally an instrument used by the aboriginal peoples of Australia its technical essence is a basic tube which is played by buzzing the lips. The thing doesn't necessarily have to be a Eucalyptus trunk hollowed out by white ants. Contemporary aborigines occasionally use cardboard mailing tubes or even Land Rover tail pipes, and on these recordings Stuart Dempster employs a plastic sewer pipe and a custom made monster didjeridu with the brass bell of a bugle attached.

Clued up readers will know that Dempster is a celebrated composer/performer famed for his site-specific recordings (one was made in the cavernous acoustics of the Fort Worden, WA cistern.) In fact his methods seem to have much in common with installation or performance art. Each of these four didjeridu pieces pay close attention to specific performance demands, sometimes involving the audience in accompanying sound production. 'Roulette' requests the audience to sing in E sharp while Dempster buzzes away in the same pitch. The resulting messy drone is a winner because of its glitches, the audience wavering or running out of breath, and the didjeridu spewing out nauseous growls and shifting rhythms. The demands of 'Didjeridervish' are five minutes of blowing through a plastic sewer pipe while spinning around. Surprisingly, the piece is quite calm and meditative, with the circular physical motion echoed in the player's (surely gasping?) circular breathing technique. 'Don't Worry It Will Come' is a playful collage of audience laughter with tubular honks, howls and farts, a joyful performance- art update on The Beach Boys' 'George Fell Into His French Horn'. But the real droning humdinger is saved for last. 'JDBBBDJ (John Diamond's Big Beautiful Brass Didjeridu)' is a 19 minute blast of the aforementioned custom-made monster tube blown with awesome authority by Dempster while the audience sing continuous pitches they hear from the instrument. They combine to make an incredibly haunting and low-droning choir, the cumulative effect like being in a long, dimly-lit underground tunnel or the belly of a grumbling whale.

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Chris Dooks

To Look North

UNITED KINGDOM NRFTA NO NUMBER CD (2002)

Regional TV has certainly lost much of its charm lately. Sky influenced production values have superseded low budget ricketiness. Slick soundbites delivered by faceless youths have overtaken banal but curious items of local interest. In the late '80's I used to gawp in thrilled disbelief as 'Uncle' Neville Wanless presented the links between programmes on Tyne Tees TV. This jovial, grey-haired and endearingly square broadcaster would fill the gaps with birthday messages from Grand-Da's and Nana's to their Grand-Bairns, sometimes holding up garish home-made cards to the camera. And where now is Tyne-Tees own Paddy MacDee, the immaculately bouffant headed news-man with the frightened stare? Consigned to the 'early-risers' slot on Radio Newcastle I'm afraid. From Dorset to Dundee it seems to be the same story, regional quirks and differences have been progressively ironed out by a professional media intent on bland homogeneity.

So it came as a pleasant surprise to find there is a physical archive of this stuff I like so much. The Northern Region Film and Television Archive is based throughout the North East of England, chiefly at Teesside University. Sound artist Chris Dooks had access to this huge treasure trove of source material during a 'Year of The Artist' residency in 2001 and has 'demixed' what he found in those shelves of dusty film tins to produce this fascinating CD. Thankfully he had the sense to edit intelligible enough passages of these Northern reports so the listener can gain some impression of what they were originally about. Using his trusty laptop he also skilfully employs repetition of phrases, stretching of words and layering of voices to sensitively create almost musical effects. Being originally from the North East Chris Dooks admits he came to the project 'with some baggage' and tellingly says 'it was a weird personal excursion for me doing this work.' His sympathy with the subject matter is obvious, picking up on cadences of accent and quirks of working class culture on the verge of extinction. There are too many evocative or amusing moments to list but 'Gravity And Friction' re-visits some flustered Primary School kids grilled by a reporter in a science class. 'After The Horse Sale' juxtaposes a beautiful distorted clip of drunken 'club style' singing with the atmospheric trotting of horse's hooves on cobbles. 'Being Married I Have No Choice' digs up a depressing item on a ballroom which ran Women Only dances, so possessive husbands might allow their wives to attend. In the background Black Box's 80's hit Right On Time resonates tinnily around the walls in a hellish caterwauling loop.

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Chris Dooks

You know, you love something little

UNITED KINGDOM LOST VESSEL 2 CD (2002)

Several short, clever electronica vignettes from UK man Dooks, who also works under his Bovine Life alias; Bovine Life have never done a lot for me I must confess, but this one is OK. He uses very small samples,, and stitches sounds together inside the computer with (usually) very little interest in creating complete musical sequences. Everything is stripped down, disconnected; yet every fragment has a certain polished quality that makes it convincing. Dooks has an oblique take on just about everything, thinking in fragmented narratives; this CD, in broken voices, disconnected images and stories related by voices out of context, reveals strange stories about small things which we value. He is a seeker of signs in the city, and in nature. Dooks is a film-maker also; he completed a documentary about Scanner, and one of his movies, converted to Quick Time, is to be found on this CD. Added to which he created the fascinating radio collage *To Look North*, which is reviewed by John Bagnall above. A sufferer from ME, Dooks can't get out the house much anymore and gives the impression that he sees the world largely through his Apple Mac - that is when he's not collaborating with fellow artists.

ED PINSENT 09/12/2002

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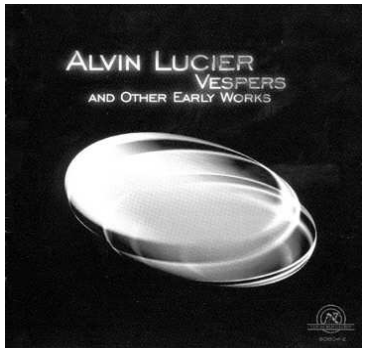
Alvin Lucier

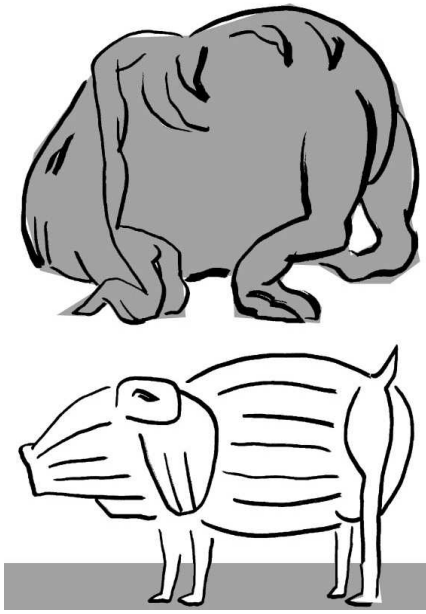
Vespers and other early works

USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80604-2 CD (2002)



A very useful CD of works from this extremely important creator, music composed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, although lovers of the quality of sound from that 'vintage' period may want to note that some of these cuts are more recent performances and recordings of early compositions. It matters little though, since at least three of these five cuts are stone-solid 'greats'. Lucier was part of the Sonic Arts Union in the 1960s, an affiliation that included Gordon Mumma, David Behrman and Robert Ashley; you'd do worse than to make yourself conversant with their works, and they are fairly

well represented by releases on Lovely Music, Cramps and Alga Marghen. Lucier's *Bird and Person Dyning* is a true 'essential' work for lovers of extreme experimentalism; if you ain't heard it, a rare (but extremely testing) treat awaits ye.



Lucier works with a very pure and simple form of sound art - a basic methodology, sculpting in real time, and refusing excessive complexity in the composition, and the means of realisation. As Chris Atton wrote in TSP 6th, 'Lucier's hesitancy with electronic construction impelled him to seek out simple systems and the minimal amount of equipment.' Amen to that. What's impressive is that, besides creating something that's very compelling to listen to and capable of a quite intense beauty, Lucier manages to generate infinite variety and rich content from extremely simple systems. It's quite some way from musical composers (especially some electronic programming-splicing fiends) who took a perverse delight in making their scores as complicated as possible.

1969's 'Vespers' for example, is simply a formalised action of a human exploring the space inside a room - and illuminating its acoustical properties, through specialist electronic sound equipment. (You could say the same of much of Lucier's work - 'I am sitting in a room' being an obvious example). The performers in 'Vespers' use hand-held pulse wave oscillators which monitor the echoes of pulse waves bouncing off the walls, floor and ceiling. Objects present in the room affect this process, obviously. A strange rattling and clicking noise lasts for 15:54 and baffles the listener. And it shows how CD technology fails us slightly; even at loud playback you don't quite get the full 'Environ-Ears' effect of the room space surrounding you, but it's astonishing anyway. That's a contemporary recording; 'Chambers', though composed in 1968, is represented here on a 2002 recording. It's another simple idea though slightly more elaborate; cassette tapes, radios and battery operated toys are put into little containers - carrier bags, boxes, shoes, kettles and little suitcases. Performers enter the recording arena carrying their little noise-containers and move around; Lucier documents the results. Spaces-within-bigger-space; wide range of acoustic and electronic qualities and timbres; a pleasing jumble of chatter and noise.

'Elegy for Albert Anastasia' is my next favourite work here - incredibly, composed as early as 1961 and completed in 1963 in an electronic music studio. A composition for electronic tapes which uses extremely low sounds 'most of which are beyond human audibility', it says here. Well, that helps. 7:22 minutes of a delicious low rumbling that opens up vistas inside your mind. Lucier seems able to probe deep questions and make philosophical reflections about human existence and the nature of things, without ever once making it terribly explicit that he's doing so. 'North American Time Capsule', for example, is supposed to be a message for aliens; and more so than much of the work here, it's packed tight with condensed data. Generated from human voices fed through a vocoder, it's too complex to be processed comfortably by human ears. In any case it's designed for a purpose greater than an artistic statement; purely electronic signals are more easily sent through space and time than complex human waveforms of speech. So maybe it's seriously intended as a message to extra-terrestrial life.

'(Middletown) Memory Space' is a 2001 recordings of a 1970 composition. Of the five this one is a bit more 'music of our time' for me, but it's a nice idea - the players perform on acoustic instruments, including a flute, piano and harp, and endeavour to recreate a simulacrum of an environmental recording thereby. To make it even tougher, it isn't so much scored as instructed; the players are trained to rely on their own memory systems to realise the work. An exceptionally open-ended agenda perhaps, but the rumbles and windy breath sounds are not unpleasant and quite clearly, everything is heavily abstracted from nature recordings.

An excellent and though-provoking collection of rare works which I recommend.

ED PINSENT 09/12/2002

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Stephan Mathieu

Die Entdeckung Des Wetters

SPAIN LUCKY KITCHEN LK019 CD (2002)

From the most mundane of commissions emerges some of the most gorgeous and gentle music, an opaque tableau of milkstone heaven-mist which is almost transcendent, even. Stephan describes briefly the art exhibit settings here which gave birth to his musical contributions, and each situation involved dull applied arts like fucking glass design and ironwork - civic art commissions for universities and 'cultural heritage' centres. A deathly context for real creativity, you'd have thought. Mathieu's music / soundart segments appear to have been set adrift in these exhibits-cum-installations, but as this release shows they're worth grabbing for home usage also (mental note: why don't B&Q / Homecare type DIY stores stock CDs like this? I might enjoy being dragged round those dumps by my sister, if they did).

Mathieu allows soft, suspended tones to dribble out of his machines, falling into a pattern like a half-hearted half-formed chord on the organ, with fluffy textures and fully rounded notes computer-processed into an elegantly finished state. Simple, 'breathy' sounds suitable for watching the clouds go by - or at least watching the glass plates fall off the gallery wall and fly through the air. Smash them to pieces. Which is what I'd like to do when I'm faced with exhibitions of 'tasteful' craft work. Issued with an attractive package including a line drawing of the Potzberg as cover art, CD scrawl by his young kid, and a homey message from the composer...to purchase or receive a Lucky Kitchen release is like getting a picture postcard in the mail, sent by an interesting pen-pal you never knew you had, from an exotic location you never knew existed. From the small and mundane beginnings, we pass into a state of bliss as we spin the music and from there we aspire to a glimpse of the infinite.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2002

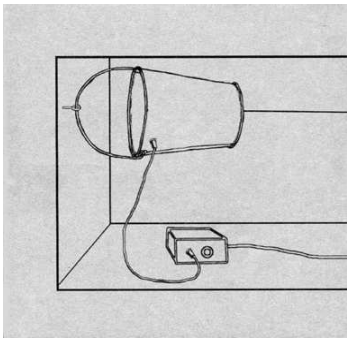
www.luckykitchen.com

Damion Romero

Feedback in a lovers telegraph

UNITED KINGDOM HARBINGER 023 CD (2002)

American soundartist Romero, also known as Speculum Fight, is famed for his resonant electroacoustic feedback systems, and his art gallery works that deal with 'seductive' tones and frequencies. A skilled electronic technician, he has built custom-made microphones inside small wooden boxes, and has worked with 'antique audio test-equipment re-wired as feedback generators'. The Paul Zenon of music, I'm sure. Visitors to a 1996 performance in Los Angeles would be amazed to see him sitting between two huge speakers, simply shaking a small piece of wood with wires dangling from it, yet generating a terrifying and monumental noise. The



present work concerns another installation, and like the dangling-wire thing, I suspect you had to be there to experience the full effect.

This release arrives packaged in an elaborate grey cardboard sleeve - a nine-fold frieze which unfolds into a drawing some three feet long! If this sketch is to be believed, then the soundwork hereon was realised by two metal buckets hung on walls, connected together by a long wire, much like a kid's tin-can wireless set. The buckets are contact-miked and a signal is generated, processed through a small amplifier. 'The vibration of the wire is amplified by the bucket, which is in turn amplified by the amplifier,' speaks an announcer's voice from out of the ether. I'm asleep already...

The result of this bucket piece is a long, vibrating, and richly resonant drone. It was recorded live in an art gallery in Los Angeles, and the recording occasionally picks up some ambient sounds of cars and people passing by (a sight more interesting than the work itself, I'm here to tell you). Mostly though, this is very basic and unremittent fridge-motor noise, rather grey and undistinguished. For me, it simply fails to transcend the process / means of production. The title is evocative, granted - a lover's telegraph is a nice idea, and presumably this is one interpretation you can make of two buckets separated by a long distance, yet still able to communicate with each other through electrical impulses. A visitor to the actual installation might indeed take away this simple message. Are the buckets empty vessels, mere receptors for feedback? But very little of this conceptual narrative is expressed in the rather inert sound we hear. Still, the folded-card package is unusual and is firmly wedded to its musical content; and it's encouraging to see such a determinedly marginal piece of conceptual avantness on this fine UK label.

ED PINSENT 03/11/2002

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Various Artists

XV

USA EDITION... NO NUMBER CD (ND)

A report from the far-flung reaches of man's endeavour this, a narrow zone where a species of observational science blends with sound art. A totally abstruse collection of hard-edged minimal noise horrors, as documented on this anonymous CD, emerges. Some of the cuts here represent quasi-scientific research, along the lines of that practised by Disinformation, and the published results (where audible) are merely peripheral as audio experiences, let alone music. The first track, an uncredited eight-minute burst of unlistenable static buzzes, derives from monitoring nuclear tests on a radio set - this non-event of an opener alone is guaranteed to alienate 99% of the civilian audience. 'This Country' is up next, by Colin Potter - a UK-based artist who I believe is something of a legend, but in what field I'm not clear. His track here is an exceptionally effective sandwich of voice overdubs, clearly assembled with great care, and rendered into a totally abstract meld. 'Rotation Evident' is by Hazard, returning once more with his weather recordings, here remade into digital blips. After a short radio broadcast, we have Steven Lance Ledbetter with his organ fans recording - another not uninteresting 'found drone'. Toy Bizarre (ie Cedric Peyronnet) turns in 'kdi dctb 066b', a strange array of letters and numbers which conceals a slightly-treated field recording made in France.

Marc Behrens appears with 'Decaying Study 4', another ultra-minimal studio assemblage made in 2000, apparently including some very quiet recordings made in a Berlin art gallery the previous year. The ninth track is by Jliat, and it's another one of his unlistenable mathematics jokes - the title, which contains a formula for its own creation, will make no sense whatsoever unless you can grasp algebra and computer programming to the depth he can; the sound he makes is unbearable. Jio Shimizu has two tracks of nice traffic sounds, and if you care to understand more of the complex system he used to obtain them, then a handy diagram and lengthy explanation is included. Finally, comes Monos with 'Glacier' which is pure Ambient drivel of the greyest available shade.

I have given myself eyestrain several times over deciphering the microscopic texts which are included, not in a handy readable booklet, but on a single circular paper insert the same size as a CD. The titles, with their strange use of numbers brackets are infuriating enough; what is even more pretentious is the scads of additional irrelevant detail, such as map references, dates, mathematical formulae and radio tunings. If you want people to know what you're doing, why not use plain English? I love contextual information, but this gobbledegook tends to reinforce my perception that these artists are just a bunch of pretentious science nerds - and I say that about some guys I like! It seems an overly obscure approach, without really needing to be. That said, this is a strong collection (without any real stand-out tracks) and filled with rather severe and clinical observations of the world and its physical realities, perceived through the filters of recording, processing, and transmission machinery.

ED PINSENT 24/11/2002

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Zeitkratzer / John Duncan

Fresh

GERMANY ALL QUESTIONS / X-TRACT AQ 03 / X-T 2005 CD (2002)

Ghastly mesmerising forces at work - a heavy abstract orchestral sound swells from the speakers, immediately putting one in mind of the popular *Instruments of the Orchestra* record hosted by classical violinist Yehudi Menuhin. That LP (which was played to me at school when I was 11) was sheer establishment propaganda, aimed at vulnerable children ostensibly to introduce them to the aspects of the full chamber orchestra, but using its jolly tone to imply that 'the trumpet is your friend', and by extension forcing young minds to accept that classical music is the highest form of music - and indeed the only way to compose, thus reinforcing all the traditional bourgeois concepts of cultural worth. Since then, of course, I've devoted myself to smashing classical music in all its forms. So, in my ideal world, this scary John Duncan record would be a perfect anti-Menuhin object. For this state of affairs to come to fruition, I suppose John Duncan would have to become accepted by the rest of the world as an exact counter-figure to that smug, overtrained violinist, much like a comic-book 'Negative Man', thus allowing him to assume the role of a mainstream hero. About as likely as the reality of air fried borsk.

If Duncan did somehow achieve this status, maybe we'd be getting music as dark as *this* at the South Bank instead of polite classical garbage along the lines of Nigel 'fucking' Kennedy. In Duncan's mitts, the orchestra is deconstructed - remade, detuned, simplified and set to play a simple grumbling, menacing growl. In fact, I'm being totally hysterical here, since zeitkatzer isn't even an orchestra - merely a ten-piece of players, but let's face it - they play so much, and so loud, they sound like ten orchestras. Of the two fine works on offer on this 40 minute CD, 'Nav-Flex' is mostly long and grindy groan-mitterings suitable for Irish Giants fighting in a bog. 'Trinity' has a passage which is more of an all-out assault, like a air strike attack on a tiny village of blue-haired trolls. Both works, nonetheless, are liberally laced with tension, edginess, and a righteous bubbling wrath. Interestingly, both tracks have been issued previously, one of them on the Ash International double-CD *A Fault In The Nothing*, about which I have already expressed my unfulfilled yearnings. Well, at this rate I'll have the whole thing on reissues soon! John Duncan is a man whose work you gotta love, even if reading about his extreme actions leads you to expect something somewhat more 'shocking' than that which he actually issues on record. I recently purchased and heard the *John See Soundtracks*, for example, which accompanied an exceptionally confrontational performance action involving extreme Japanese hard-core porn films, a darkened chamber, and a fire extinguisher. It sounds a little grim, hein? Yet the music on the disc was quite digestible, not at all impossible-to-process, as indeed is this present release...Duncan may be a modern puritan in some ways. His stern glare is reproachful, castigating modern evils and excesses, and insisting on an ascetic, devotional curative for them.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2002

www.allquestions.net
www.zeitkratzer.de
www.johnduncan.org

VINYL VIANDS

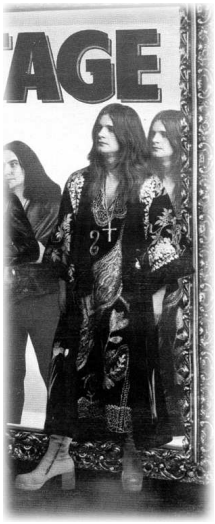
Put a Dolphin in your Dansette!

The Black Stuff

By Ed Pinsent

A superficial slurry of vinyl drippings from the maw of the beast

As is my custom, here be another thirty vinyl viands plucked pretty much at random from my purchases of the last few months. There is no rhyme or reason to my collecting patterns - instead I tend to take what the fates may offer me and ask questions later. As you can see, the prices for many of these shellac scarabs were quite reasonable and have allowed me to back-track into areas of my past where sane men ought not to go. But then, this is something to do with the appeal of collecting records; you know you will never have enough time to really enjoy them properly, yet the possibility of gaining control over so much encapsuled time embedded into these hairline grooves is appealing. Vinyl Viands offer a practical form of time-travel, in many ways. Quite a lot of entertaining 'rock' music this time around - I'm sure you're all fed up of hearing about the avant-shit music by this point anyway.



Black Sabbath
Sabotage
UNITED KINGDOM NEMS RECORDS AND TAPES 9119 001 (1975)

One more step in my master plan to acquire all the early Sabs LPs on vinyl. This one, though some consider it a minor work in the canon, has the best 'Side One' this band ever did - feedback howl leading straight into the massive Tony Iommi riff for 'Hole In The Sky', a thundering rock-chasm than which guitar metal gets no heavier, in my book - and on top of it you get the unholy wail of Meister Osbourne keening a tortured melody out of the darkness. Rest of side one is a merry romp through paranoia, anxiety and megalomania. Side two has the grotesque English Chamber Choir wailing on 'Supertzar', a classical rock abomination to rival *Atom Heart Mother*. An unbeatable LP and only £2 to me at a Brummie record fair - how fitting! - features classic 'magic mirror' cover, and the Oz dressed in a ludicrous kaftan and suede boots.

Various synth-wielding boffins
The Soundhouse: Music from the BBC Radiophonic Workshop
UNITED KINGDOM BBC RECORDS REC 467 (1983)

While not representative of the 'great' early period - ie no Delia Derbyshire in sight - this is worth picking up for some nifty mid-1980s examples of the Workshop's synthesiser craft. Most tracks were used as incidental TV music, for obscure shows which must have eluded me at the time, although there's a bunch of great radio music / sound effects too. Features the composers Paddy Kingsland, Malcolm Clarke, Peter Howell and Roger Limb. A BBC record with a halfway decent cover for a change, which while attempting to be futuristic at that time of course looks very dated now. At least it exists, since the story of neglect and abuse which the BBC poured onto this little creative knot hidden inside the corridors of Broadcasting House always brings a tear to the eye. You would never get anything like the Workshop in today's BBC, since it's staffed and fuelled entirely by mindless fresh-faced media students who may understand the form of television (and even this is doubtful), but have nothing whatsoever to communicate. Also of interest - the title refers to a quote by Francis Bacon from his 17th century treatise *The New Atlantis*. This entire text (a Daphne Oram favourite) was used wholesale by Sonic Boom for his CD of the same name, so clearly he owns this vinyl slab also. Mine cost £3 and I assume it's 'worth' more, but it was a lucky find. Be sure to check out the recent BBC CDs of RW music, which are much better. Of interest - this copy contains an original press release from the BBC!

Crispin Hellion Glover
The Big Problem
USA RESTLESS 7 72316-1 (1989)

A truly bizarre LP which no-one in their right mind should own - which is why I'm taking my doctor's advice, and admitting myself into the booby hatch tomorrow. Glover is a self-made weirdo of a fairly high order - many know him through his rare film appearances, for example as an intense west-coast psychotic kid in *River's Edge*. Here he invites us to step inside his diseased mind, as he recites his own prose and poetry and attempts a species of musical song, with the help of Barnes and Barnes (the wackoids who released 'Fish Heads' on Rhino Records). He also uses sleeve art as a mini-gallery to exhibit his paintings and photo-montages, and the booklet inside shows pages from his treated novel *Oak-Mot*. This creepy tome (like a David Lynch version of *A Humument*) is available as an artist's book from Mark Pawson. Couldn't resist picking this LP up at collector's price - £20 from a large record fair in Wembley, I think - but apart from the dark delights of the 'Clowny Clowny Clown' song, it's not a record you can revisit easily.

The Moody Blues

In Search of The Lost Chord

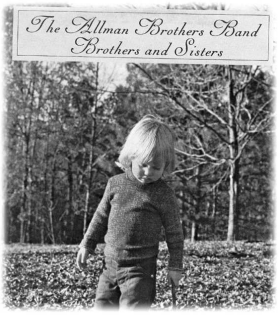
UNITED KINGDOM DERAM SML 711 (1968)

Yes, I know - shameful isn't it? This comes from their early-ish psychedelic phase, it's their third LP from 1968, and contains their rousing hit from that era 'Ride my See-Saw'. Sadly the rest of the LP doesn't quite live up to the optimistic energy of that opener, but instead comprises many fey and wimpy English attempts at portraying the psychedelic experience through acoustic guitars, recorders and ethereal voices. They witter on with a familiar mix of symbols for LSD allusions and half-baked Eastern mysticism; hence 'House of Four Doors' and 'Legend of a Mind', and like that. Housed in quite possibly one of the worst LP covers ever painted in gouache, unless you include those by Steve Hackett's girlfriend for his 1970s solo LPs like *Voyage of The Acolyte*. This monstrous image was singled out for harsh criticism in, of all things, a European 1960s book about the Art of Kitsch. Don't bother with buying any other Moody Blues LP, or indeed this one if you can possibly avoid it. Cost - £3, which I suppose isn't too bad for a decent Deram original.

The Allman Brothers Band

Brothers and Sisters

USA CAPRICORN RECORDS K 47507 (1973)



Since Duane Allman had bought his ticket by this point, most connoisseurs of this 'people's band' tend to regard this as not one of their best LPs. True, it's no *Live at the Fillmore*, but by me it's a great Southern Blues rocker with fine toons and songs, plenty of great organ work by Gregg Allman, besides the superb guitar licks from Richard Betts. 'Wasted Words' is particularly fine, a letter of reproach from a scorned lover who, far from feeling downcast, is spectacularly triumphant at having escaped the unhealthy relationship, and effectively 'flips the bird' to his ex in song. Trivia fans may wanna know that 'Jessica' is used as theme tune for a fucking Jeremy Clarkson show about motor cars on TV, which means if you purchase this you won't have to suffer watching that moronic buffoon ever again and can enjoy the music for what it is. Some of my friends appear puzzled that I like the music of this band of uncouth hairy hippies (Edwin Pouncey turned me onto 'em), but listen - when they start rocking out, they can approach Grateful Dead proportions of lengthy guitar improv effectiveness. Price - £4.

Holy Modal Rounders

Last Round

USA ADELPHI RECORDS INC AD 1030 (1978)

Featuring the 'godlike genius' of singer Peter Stampfel, whom I saw perform at a memorable set in December 2001 with the amazing Gary Lucas, that guitarist's guitarist with his wide-brimmed hat who was once in The Magic Band and for my money outclasses showoff Henry Kaiser any day of the week. That concert was on a brief tour organised by the Blue Navigator people in Ireland, who also do great tours of Michael Hurley. If you're not plugged into this American songster scene, you should rectify the matter immediately - although Michael Hurley vinyl LPs are not easy to come by, I think there's a fair number of CD reissues. Stampfel made two folky LPs in the 1960s with his buddy Robin Remaily, emerging from the Greenwich village scene in NYC I assume, where they ripped into any number of blues and folk songs with a depth of passion, knowledge and sheer euphoria that makes Lonnie Donegan look pretty pathetic. The Rounders later gained notoriety for 'If You Want to be a Bird', a bizarre ditty used on the *Easy Rider* soundtrack. This LP comes from 1978, features a full band, and comprises mostly songs penned by Stampfel or Remaily, although some fans would be happy just to listen to Peter rattle through the repertoire of songs he knows - hits, obscurities, forgotten songs, traditional songs, and any number of country and blues songs from the rich heritage of Americana. Stampfel knows them well and can not only sing them, but he knows something about their meanings too. But this head knowledge is secondary to the man's utterly distinctive voice, which though it may be an acquired taste for some, contains his fingerprints, his soul, his inner being poured through a cracked cheese-strainer. Not the best ever HMR record - *Alleged in their Time* is arguably superior - but who can resist the pix of PS's bottle-cap collection on the cover? (Stampfel is probably only outdone by Richard Meltzer in this area of arcana). £10 from a record fair. I think you'd pay more nowadays.

Flash

Flash

UNITED KINGDOM SOVEREIGN SVNA 7251 (1972)

A melodic prog-rock curio which I never bought at the time in the 1970s, but often wondered about - mainly because of the LP cover I suppose, featuring a girl's skirt being blown up and revealing her floral knickers, an image by the Hipgnosis clowns which got the LP banned in Franco's Spain. Musically it turns out to be a decent enough piece of noodling and riffery without too much of the fast-moving showing off which we love this genre for. Performed by five ginks I've never heard of before or since (although I gather Peter Banks used to be in Yes) and produced by Derek Lawrence in London. The music is better than the indifferent vocals - like many of these bods they shoulda just stuck to instrumentals, freaking out with tricky time signatures. Judging by gatefold inside, the emphasis is on mixing boards, musicianship and long hair. Sovereign appears to be an EMI subsidiary; cost was £5.

Todd Rundgren

Something / Anything?

USA BEARSVILLE RECORDS 2BX 2066 2 x LP (1972)

Although you really need to hear virtually all of Todd's 'early' stuff on Bearsville, this tour de force explodes with more wow-factor than most (with the exception of the essential *A Wizard, A True Star*). Contains some of the best songs he ever wrote, including the hits like 'Hello, It's Me' and 'It Wouldn't Have Made Any Difference', among a clutch of great love songs, high-school memories, and eccentric humour ditties like 'Song of the Viking'. What's amazing is that sides 1-3 are also all played and sung entirely by Todd, working in the ID Sound studio in Los Angeles with his simpatico engineer. Some one-man bands (like Alan Parsons Project) can end up sterile and cold in their efforts to get all the overdubbed tracks to match up perfectly; not our Todd, who rocks out like a monster and *still* delivers a flawlessly-produced double LP! He plays organ and drums like a souped-up Motown band and sings out his soul caring not a fig if he's Solomon Burke or Tony Bennett, or all points in between. The technical skill alone in doing this is impressive enough, but you soon forget to admire it as you're swept up in the suite of emotions contained in these brilliant songs and bright music. Side four features a big band (including the Brecker Brothers on horns) and a chorus of singers, and renders the Jools Holland Big Band completely redundant in two seconds flat (not that that's particularly difficult). Greatness on two legs - that's our Todd.

National Health

National Health

UNITED KINGDOM AFFINITY AFF6 (1978)

A nice Affinity reissue of a splendid semi-composed jazz-rock workout. These goons are part of the Canterbury Scene and sometimes get overlooked in favour of Soft Machine or even

Caravan - at least they were overlooked by me for a time. I don't think they made that many available records in any case. On this slab, here be four long tracks composed by the keyboard players, Dave Stewart or Alan Gowen, and featuring some nice scat-singing by Amanda Parsons to carry the melody. Not quite as twee as Hatfield and the North (with which there is mucho overlap, personnel-wise), and although the sound with its chiming electric pianos and subdued electric guitars may appear too 'tasteful' to some, I very much care for it. This one was a mere £5, though Baggy tells me he located a CD reissue on Spalax which may be useful for those who have to hear this.

Back to 78 - New Wave and Punk Rock interlude

Public Image
First Issue
UNITED KINGDOM VIRGIN RECORDS LTD V2114 (1978)

Punk rock and new wave has been something of a chasm in my appreciation of 'music'. Although admittedly of record-buying age in 1976-1978, my allegiances at that time remained firmly with the best-selling popular progressive rock (and related stuff) of the period. It took ages before I would start buying punk rock records, UK or otherwise - I completed a *Pebbles* collection first! Actually to give myself an iota of credit I liked the PiL single 'Public Image' muchly at the time and purchased it with dispatch in 1978. This LP is kind of interesting although not a patch on the *Metal Box* monster (which I own as *Second Edition*). My old fine art painting buddy Dave Pickett thought PiL had a lot to answer for because they pretty much 'invented' The Cure. I never saw the connection myself, but that IS a heavy burden to lay on Wobble's bass and Levene's flanged guitar. The sleeve for this LP imitates fashion magazines in a way that beats the Spandau Ballet clowns at their own game, but it's still a rather thin joke. Still, there's no denying singer Lydon delivers many a penetrating insight here, and continues to do so to this day.

Various Goons with Guitars
New Wave
UNITED KINGDOM VERTIGO 6300 902 (1977)

A odd and ill-fitting compilation of yr basic American punk and new wave, including The Ramones, Patti Smith, Richard Hell and The Voidoids and Talking Heads, mixed with UK acts The Boomtown Rats and The Damned. One LP that isn't quite as 'nasty' as the cover art of young man spitting beer at the camera suggests. More dated are the designer 'freaks' who adorn the back cover, photographed not in the streets but in some NY photographer's studio. We've got a range of styles here that now appear to have been plucked straight from the fashion catalogue. But the music's all fine. Although issued in 1977 I guess, the earliest track here is from 1973 and (in the same way that pub rock shades into punk rock in the UK) you can discern the crossover with more 'straight' rock moosic, provided courtesy of The Flamin' Groovies, New York Dolls and The Runaways - Joan Jett's first band. Also noteworthy how many name producers are involved from the history of great rock music - Kim Fowley, Todd Rundgren, Lenny Kaye, Nic Lowe and even Shadow Morton, producer of The New York Dolls here, but also the man behind the Shangri-Las. When I saw adverts for this in the music press I winced like the young prude I was at the sight of a track called 'Piss Factory', assuming from use of four-letter word it must be a sleazy slice of vilery...in fact it's a heartfelt Patti Smith poem about the ravages which time can wreak on a working man's life. Like I say a strange choice of trax, but useful...

Various Spiky Thugs
The Roxy London WC2 (Jan-Apr 77)
UNITED KINGDOM EMI RECORDS SHSP 4069 (1977)

Compiled by Mike Thorne for Sisterdale, yet licensed to a major label - may have smacked of EMI cash-in at the time, but this is a nifty 'historical' compilation of the short-lived London venue that played host to many important UK punk bands. Not a bad listen either, although the Manor Mobile tape was kept running a little too long to capture 'ambience' of the club, eg phones ringing, chatter, warm-ups and period gossip. 'Is Sid Vicious here tonight?', remarks one trendy patron. With Wire, Buzzcocks, Eater, The Unwanted, Slaughter and the Dogs, X-Ray Spex and Johnny Moped. As ever with this kinda music, I like it best when it's pretty incompetent - Eater and The Unwanted win hands down on that score, but Poly Styrene manages a forced primitivism when she has a hysteric fit on her rendition of 'Oh Bondage Up Yours!'; and how many bands can match the two high-energy bursts by the mighty Buzzcocks? I certainly can't, but that's because I'm so outta condition. The front cover is fab and conveys the standards for the grungy conditions that so many London venues continue to follow to this day; you can feel your shoes sticking to the floor coated with months of stale beer.

The Saints
(I'm) Stranded
THE NETHERLANDS EMI 5C 062-82359 (1977)

A Dutch reissue of this matchless Australian punk LP. Ten tracks of nasty incompetent guitar scuzz which isn't actually quite nasty or incompetent enough for me. But the energy buzz is, erm, considerable. Ed Kuepper's finest moment, according to those who know.

X-Ray Spex
Germfree Adolescents
UNITED KINGDOM EMI RECORDS INS 3023 (1978)

One from late 1978 as I recall, as I liked the single when it played on the jukebox at the vile, yellowing coffee bar at Liverpool Art School at that time, when I would drink vile, yellowing coffee from a vile plastic cup. X-Ray Spex were later said to capture the 'art-school angst' of late 1978, which is curious because I also felt nothing else but anxiety and self-conscious woe at the time. About two years later, I saw an art movie called *Riddles of the Sphinx* by film theorists Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey, where they used Poly Styrene's version of 'Identity' on the soundtrack to make some laboured point about sexual politics, much to the derision of the clued-up young artists in the audience. At the same college, a young student named Rachel would regale us in the screen-printing room with her rendition of the lyric from 'I Can't Do Anything' - *'I hit him back with my pet rat!'* Ah, what memories. Can't tell you much I enjoy this jolly LP now, purchased in 2002 - full of quirky little songs, of which I especially like 'Warrior In Woolworths'. Poly's voice is no longer a harsh wail to me, now it's a mannered guttural vocal fit to join the ranks of other English loony singers like Roy Harper or Kate Bush. A shame she couldn't sustain the onslaught, but then she might have become Tanita Tikaram, which would never do. Having secured this vinyl version, I also glommed a CD version which comes with an extra CD of a live performance - haven't heard it but it's sure to be 'all wrong' on CD anyway.

The Rezillos

Can't Stand The Rezillos
UNITED KINGDOM SIRE RECORDS K56530 (1978)

OK, have to admit this is probably very far from real punk, another mannered 'art school' concept band much like X-Ray Spex above, or The B-52s, whom I also love, or Roxy Music before them. But it's 13 cuts of delight, hi-energy pop punched home with confident power chords and a slightly 'viscous' edge in the lyrix. ('Put th' boot in!') The cover art is a tacky combination of 'abstract' painting and hard-edged comic-strip art that prefigures BIFF and later BRUTE. Delicious and colourful it be, I seem to recall seeing a nifty collection of their 45s someplace, and those picture sleeves were unmatched for delirious high tack. And who can forget the irony of seeing their version of 'Top of the Pops' performed on TOTP? Now those were the days when bands seemed to think the game was worth the candle. Recorded in NYC and released on a Warners subsidiary. And is my copy complete with the trading cards insert? You betcha. Another great one to blast out the place on Saturday morning after my usual breakfast of choco-Weetos.

Crass

Yes Sir, I Will
UNITED KINGDOM CRASS RECORDS 121984-2 (1983)

One of a clutch of Crass LPs which I famously picked up in a single day, thus acquiring an 'instant' Crass collection. Whether I actually want to keep it is quite another matter! Believe it or not (and many don't) I saw Crass play in 1981 at a Birmingham venue where they headlined an 'anarchist' evening along with Flux Of Pink Indians, Annie Anxiety, and other unruly screamers presumably affiliated with their label. It was a notable evening because me and my companion were the only ones wearing jackets and ties, which is why we got mistaken for venue officials by a friendly leather-clad Brummie youngster outside the gate. Of the Crass LPs I've actually played so far (I have spent some time simply reading the sleeves and wincing at the sight of the ugly sleeve art), *The Feeding of The Five Thousand* has struck me as quite experimental for its time - it's not just raging guitars and shouted lyrics, but is cleverly sequenced and contains many weird sounds (use of shortwave radios is very nice). *Yes Sir I Will* is their anti-Falklands LP, of which side one comprises a single excoriating track - an extended ranting free-form song-poem yawped out by the assorted indignant vocalists over a sprawling noise of guitars and drums. It's both monotonous, and airless - you can't even stop to consider the ramifications of one challenging polemic, before the next one is flung in your face, relentlessly. Starting from the Falklands war, this heartfelt scream of anguish rails against every possible illness in modern society - capitalism, warfare, censorship, church, state, royalty, racism, hypocrisy, Thatcherism, pollution, nuclear arms, meat-eating, and, erm, Harrods of Knightsbridge. The length and breadth of this bitter broadside is remarkable - the lyrics are printed in a tiny typeface and still occupy two pages of the sleeve! I think what appeals to me is the remarkable high-minded arrogance of these guys, their conviction, and the passion behind it - they're not out to persuade you with reasoned argument alone, but through wailing, hectoring and bellowing in a tone of righteous indignation. Of course, no reasonable person can expect to endure this caterwauling for long, but you are put in the uncomfortable position of having to figure out where you stand in relation to their deliberately extreme interrogative stance. They won't take indifference for an answer. This, I gather, was pretty much the idea.

End of New Wave and Punk Rock interlude

Lucifer

Lucifer
ITALY AKARMA AK 044 (2001)

One of many Akarma reissues which may currently be cluttering up th' racks of your local emporium of vinyl, of which there are so many one doesn't know where to begin - they may all be undiscovered gems of prog, jazz-rock and folk, or they may all be indifferent clunkers. One connoisseur I know spurns each and every one of these Akarma retreads, as the remasterings sound so muddy, and the producers sometimes fuck around with the original playing order of the tracks; I guess their version of the Quatermass LP proves his point, as to squeeze in their extra cuts they repressed this single Harvest LP as a double! Lucifer are not Quatermass (they have no Hammond organ), but were a UK band from the lovely town of Rochester, and produced this underground heavy song-based LP in 1970. They were allegedly influenced by Uriah Heep and Grand Funk Railroad, LPs by neither of which have never polluted my abode, but they do a flabby version of 'Get It Together' that sadly fails the comparison test - it's like Angel Delight compared to the chocolate mousse of the original. Since they trust so much in the expression of the sung word, Lucifer should perhaps have recruited a better singer than the very derivative Joe Mattioli, who warbles like the Kwik-Save version of Joe Cocker. Still, they had a nice satanic logo and look like sturdy, reliable guys from their photo.

Terry Riley

Shri Camel
USA CBS 73929 (1980)

Always misapprehended this as a 'late' release by my favourite holy minimalist drone organ-grinder, and frequently left it mouldering in the shops where I encountered it, but finally I wised up and realised it's only from 1980 thus predating my other late Riley fave, *The Harp of The New Albion*, a Just Intonation piano double LP which is excellent. Working to that form of twisted logic, I snarfed this up and it turns out to be as rewarding as a large plum pie, laced with sweet brandy. Oddly enough it was his first American release since 1969 and a return to his 'home' label of CBS, who amazingly had the prescience to put out *In C* and *Rainbow in Curved Air* - the latter LP remaining in print for years through a crazy succession of inappropriate sleeves, as the CBS execs tried desperately to sucker in changing youth markets to develop a yen for American mystical minimal music. In the interim Riley had been releasing gems of unspoken glory on French and other European labels throughout the 1970s. By this point he had begun to opt for a more polished sound and was embracing the new technology, so instead of the glorious wheezy old organ and analogue delay of the unsurpassable *Persian Surgery Dervishes*, he used one of the new Yamaha electronic organs with computer delay - not quite as slick and soulless as the processed sounds available since then, of course, but it makes you miss his 1960s organ. The pseudo Eastern sleeve art reminds us of Riley's commitment to Sufi religion - a life-changing event for him which arrived courtesy of Pandit Pran Nath, the holyman who also seduced La Monte Young but didn't get Charlemagne Palestine (see issue five).

Tesendalo

Laura
GERMANY
STAUBGOLD 2 (1998)

A lovely simple electronic drone LP from 1998, and in a way typical of the soothing electro minimal harmonic noise in which Staubgold would attempt to corner the market; I've yet to encounter a 'nasty' or harsh noise release from this German label. Of interest because it's a low number (the second release) and because of the hand-made packaging - a wallet constructed out of sturdy box card and brass staples, with stickers printed on textured cream paper. A refreshing lack of 'imagery' in the design (apart from the abstract colour photo on front cover), which matches the non-specificity of the floating music. Quite heavenly. Wonder if they'll ever reissue their back catalogue?

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Henry Mancini

Mr Lucky

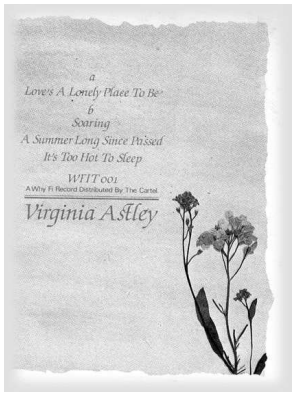
USA RCA VICTOR LSP-2198 (1960)

One of many records purchased from my trip to Seattle, this one turned up in the biggest Charity Shop I ever did see - called Goodwill and apparently it's part of a chain, staffed by enthusiastic volunteers from the differently-abled sectors of society. Our local English Oxfam and Scope shops show how we think small - they're the size of a pocket handkerchief, reek of dry-cleaning fluid and, when it comes to old LPs, have a meagre box full of scratched old popular classics, party LPs, and 1980s fourth-division hit LPs. In America it's marginally better because there's so much of the damn stuff to get your mitts on - this Goodwill store I visited was the size of a barn, with about three aisles full of unreadable paperback books, 25 shelves of broken electrical equipment, and about half an acre of smelly old clothes and accessories. Shopping with Jesse Paul Miller, we both gravitated towards the old vinyl section and swiftly picked over the 18 or so shelves bulging with cheap cast-offs, using our expert eyes. I plucked out this little item for $1.99 mainly attracted by the elegant sleeve design in red and black, plus the *Living Stereo - Miracle Surface* label at the top of the sleeve which graces so many cheap LPs in Jesse's boxes. Not a bad listen either as I discovered the day after my flight home - *Mr Lucky* was an obscure CBS TV show which we never saw in this country, and Mancini the jobbing composer probably knocked this theme and variations out in an afternoon in 1959. Reeely tasteful lounge jazz it be, with jaunty tunes and a cool sound. I prefer instrumental EZ Listening when I can get it (love those lush string sounds) and while he's no Esquivel, Mancini has his undeniable moments. At any one time in the 1990s I probably could have taken this same LP off a wall in any Soho record shop and be charged £25. Maybe all those UK record dealers had been visiting Goodwill shops too.

Virginia Astley

Love's A Lonely Place To Be

UNITED KINGDOM WHY FI WFIT 001 (1982)

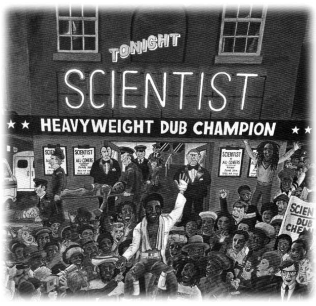


Having finally found a copy of *From Gardens Where We Feel Secure* and found it every bit as blissful as I knew it would be, I picked up this 12" from a record fair which is from the same period and in like vein. Like the *Gardens* LP, this uses field recordings from English villages and combines it with tasteful acoustic chamber music to produce a heavenly effect and in many ways it knocks spots off lots of the recordings I have raved about in the Environmental and Field Recordings Sections over the years. This could be because Astley has a clear vision of what she wants to achieve, and is totally committed to living the English Life (even at the expense of being branded an eccentric) in the same way as, say, the great Kate Bush; indeed both might be said to share the same nostalgia and dreams for an idealised England that never really existed. Astley however never becomes overly sentimental about it, and developed something all her own, finding a new and original way to express a certain kind of sorrow about a lost England full of pastures green, that we also find in the work of 1970s folk-rock combo The New Albion Band; or perhaps in the classical tone-poem *A Shropshire Lad* by English composer George Butterworth. GB was killed in the Somme in World War One and thus joined the ranks of fallen youths like Wilfred Owen. Astley used to be in The Ravishing Beauties, who made a Wilfred Owen war poem 'Futility' into a gorgeous song on the now-forgotten NME tape, *Mighty Reel* (NME 004) released in 1982. Whatever became of Astley?

Scientist

Heavyweight Dub Champion

UNITED KINGDOM GREENSLEEVES GREL 13 (1980)



A fine dub LP from Scientist (Henry Junjo Lawes) who I think was still a young acoltye of King Tubby when this came out in 1980, as indeed did another one his masterpieces *Scientist Meets The Space Invaders*. I used to own the latter tho' foolishly sold same as it seemed out of place in my LP collection - this was before I had any other dub music to keep it company - but had been attracted by tracks played on John Peel show (obviously) and by the Space Invaders theme, an arcade game to which I was much addicted at the time. I'm not addicted to boxing, but still when a Scientist LP on Greensleeves turns up in a shop for a mere 8 bones, I know when to reach for my wallet. Scientist produces the most likeable dub records ever made - not as far-out as King Tubby's productions perhaps, but they are irresistible and contain the fruitiest bass sound this side of a plantain. One of many great Tony McDermott painted record covers; he used to specialise in these busy crowd scenes, this one featuring a triumphant Scientist in his shorts emerging from the boxing match onto a street full of admirers and media acclaim. The McDermott style was copied successfully on the Barmy Army LP produced by Adrian Sherwood (thanks t'War Arrow for pointing this out).

Lee Perry

Wizdom 1971-1975

AUSTRALIA ASCENSION RECORDS ANLP 001 (ND)

A crucial compilation of Lee Perry 45s - A and B Sides carefully put together by a weird little Australian label. Here be 14 cuts of sheer dynamic mastery from 'Jamaica's Young DJs chatting up a storm' over Lee Perry riddems - among the vocal groups are The Groovers, The Silvertones, Young Dillinger, The Hurricanes, The Upsetters, Dennis Alcapone and The Inspirations. At These Records (whence this came), it was pointed out that The Upsyndicates is a hybrid group composed of members of The Upsetters and The Syndicates, but that information means nothing to me. My favourite track anyway is I Roy joyously whooping his way through 'Doctor Who', and a version of same where you can really hear the tastiest ever organ lick riding over a crisp rhythm track that'll have your pulsebeat jumping like a plate of corn mash. Man, it's the goods!! I know this 1973 'Doctor Who' track from a fine Trojan CD of Perry's work called *Chapter 2 of 'Words'*, and might wanna point out it's probably got nothing to do with the UK's science fiction TV show which would have featured Jon Pertwee at that time. Actually I have no idea what it IS about, but the singer recites a whole string of names belonging to pretty girls who have all no doubt succumbed to the good Doctor's charms, hence the confidence and joy in I Roy's superbly swaggering delivery here. Great LP with some nice facsimiles of the sevens' labels here - the Panther label is a particularly striking design!

Joni Mitchell

Blue

USA REPRISE RECORDS K 44128 (1971)

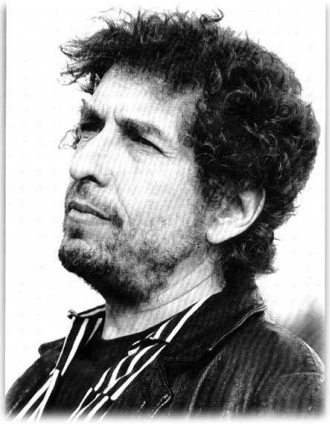
I guess I hadda give in and start delving into Joni's early work - myself, I'm completely sold on the later stuff from the mid 1970s and consider the LPS *Hejira* and *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* among my favourite sides, followed closely by the earlier *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. True, she is totally out of her gourd - but that's what makes it all so interesting. How many singers who have patterned their lives after that of Georgia O'Keefe do we get on major record labels these days? Joni's lyrics are so deeply egocentric and absurdly pretentious that it's amazing she finds a way to cram the multi-syllabic nonsense of it all into a single verse, but even so her words probe the areas other singer-songwriters fail to reach. With all the tedious twists of her semi-bohemian meandering life used as source material, we have a strain of the beatnik aesthetic transplanted into the mainstream, and in way that makes more sense than wimpy old Jack Kerouac. Then you have the bonus of the eccentric guitar-tunings - mostly

complex and unpredictable open-chord tunings which baffled other players, with the exception of the noble Jaco Pastorius who ably wove his bass around her chords like a snake on the *Don Juan* LP. Here on *Blue*, a true 'stay indoors and wimper' LP as opposed to those later 'drop out and hit the road' recs, Joni's voice was still squeaky and child-like and has the kind of come-hither attraction that was probably a selling point for many lonely males; she sings in a way that to listen to the record is to aurally put your arms around her. *Blue* was spun to me at art college by certain owner who glibly proclaimed Mitchell was 'the female Bob Dylan' and (while I fiercely dispute that statement) I realise now it would have made a great bedsit LP for crying tears of remorse into glasses of alcohol. It's so maudlin that reportedly Jon Anderson (singer in Yes) has to lie down before he plays it. *Puke!*

Bob Dylan

Good As I Been to You

USA COLUMBIA 472710 1 (1992)



One of a pair of LPs of traditional US songs and folk music (the other is *World Gone Wrong*) that Dylan released in the early 1990s and thereby surprised not a few of his followers, I gather. I think I first got wind of them through the Greil Marcus book *Invisible Republic*; it's taken me until recently to hunt them both down, and find both are excellent. Dylan's basic strumming approach and (by then) cracked and broken voice make for a winning combo, as does his carefully-concealed scholarship of the source material which suffuses each line, as surely as if he were a Shakespearean actor. Heretical though it be to admit it, I'm not 100% sold on the Dylan deal since I find his records with full rock band are very indifferent as recorded artefacts - even the supposedly great *Blonde On Blonde*, which struck me as under-produced. Conversely, give me a Dylan record with just him and a guitar and I'm reasonably happy - *The Other Side Of* is a fave. But then I struggle with many of his lyrics, particularly those packed with layers of obscure symbols. So to hear him tackle this traditional material is certainly good for me. This set contains some of my fave American ballads and songs, for example 'Little Maggie' which is a song about a man's alcoholic wife and their troubled life (the version I know is an Old Timey song by Grayson and Whitter), and 'Froggie Went A' Courtin' where without any trouble at all, Dylan removes any trace of corny Burl Ives homeliness from the song and actually makes you want to listen to the story, to find out if the Frog's courtship turns out OK. Now, how many artists can breath that much life into a familiar story?

Krzysztof Penderecki

The Devils of Loudon

PHILIPS 6700 042 2 X LP (ND)

Been assembling whatever I can of this Polish composer's 1960s works, which are unmatched when it comes to charging the air with scary, gloomy atmospheres. Particularly successful have been those which deal with human disasters - *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*, for example, or *Utrenja, The Entombment of Christ*. The latter uses a mixed choir of voices that creates a profound groaning and wailing effect that has to be heard to be believed. This one likewise deals with a historical disaster - the extraordinary story of rebel priest Urbain Grandier, his followers in 17th century Loudon and the subsequent scandals in the Catholic church, leading to Grandier's arrest, torture and execution by burning at the stake. For Catholic Polish Penderecki, this tasty theme was a natural choice. Although this isn't my favourite ever record by old Penders (due to necessity of telling a dramatic story, it contains quite a lot of singing and speech-song in atonal manner, which gets quite fatiguing), I did manage to get through it in one sitting and found it a sufficiently moving experience - not to say ponderous and depressing. Have no idea when this monster was recorded, though surmise it's about 1968-ish. The Urbain Grandier story must really capture the human imagination - it's been told many times, first by Aldous Huxley and then by John Whiting who dramatised it, subsequently by Ken Russell who made the notorious X-rated 1970s movie *The Devils* with Oliver Reed. Two LPs of pain, misery and futility.

The Young Tradition

Galleries Revisited

UNITED KINGDOM TRANSATLANTIC RECORDS LTD TRA SAM 30 (1973)

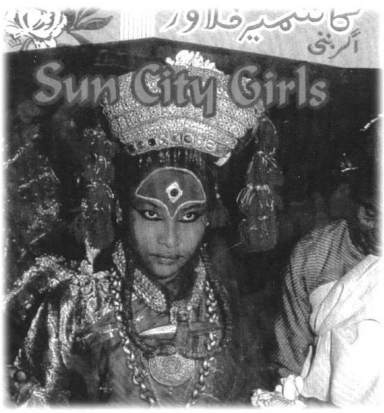
An excellent 1969 set (here reissued in 1973) from these three folky radicals of Albion, Heather Wood, Royston Wood and Peter Bellamy and their quirky throaty warbles. Besides their singing career as a threesome, The Young Tradition also sang with Shirley Collins at an early stage, and Peter Bellamy went on to release bunch of obscure records as a solo songster (most notoriously with his musical settings of Rudyard Kipling poems). Here be an unusual selection of folk songs, agricultural songs, carols, and what have you - based on their extensive knowledge of the subject but also borrowing the singing of other, older singers (such as Harry Cox or the Copper family) to use as templates. They even borrow from American idioms, such as on 'Stones in My Passway', a clever blues pastiche; and 'Wondrous Love' and 'Idumea', both of which are Sacred Harp hymns. What's more it's produced by the great Bill Leader and has guest musicians of the highest calibre - including David Munrow (the scholar of medieval instruments), Dave Swarbrick and Dolly Collins. What else could a listener desire? Well, their voices do veer towards the 'odd' - strenuously aiming for something utterly and unmistakeably English, they refuse to suppress their regional accents and inflections, and indeed may even go out of their way to cultivate these elements in a bid to increase their ethnic authenticity. Bellamy I think is especially keen on singing in this rather rustic way. And together, their harmonies are so piercing that they verge on the eerie. To me it's a charming combination, but some listeners ran a mile from this full-bodied roaring. This radical approach of theirs was not guaranteed to appeal to the mainstream folk audience, but it could be they successfully incarnated the spirit of old English folk, and more importantly resurrected the spirits of the songsters they were trying to emulate. Full marks.

Sun City Girls

330,003 Crossdressers from Beyond the Rig Veda

USA LOCUST MUSIC LOCUST NO 4 3 x LP (2002)

A limited vinyl version of a double-CD set, originally released in that format by Sun City Girls on their own Abduction label in 1996. Played it once - it's an impressive and sprawling set of insane songs and wild guitar-based instrumentals, and (with help of regular collaborators Scott Colburn and Eyvind Kang) they sound like a full orchestra with their amassed collections of exotic foreign instruments. At least one side, with 'Cineraria Blue', 'Shin Paku' and 'Lies up the Niger' could be described as a bizarre collection of ethnological forgeries, a tongue-in-cheek form of pastiche which I think was invented by Can (unless you count John Fahey's first mail-order releases). The advantage of this lavish double-gatefold release is that it can exhibit full colour pictures from the Bishops' collections of Asian art and photography that take great delight in

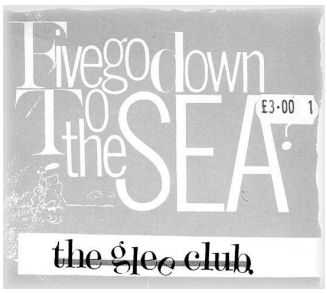


the extremes of 'otherness' offered by these non-Western cultures, in particular the costume, ceremony and sexuality of those climes. Lebanese-Americans Rick Bishop and his brother Alan also run a mail-order bookselling business on the side, offering specialist literature and art from Asia. A lot of people (myself included) have been quite daunted by this bizarre trio, partly because of their enormous, inaccessible, and mostly unavailable recorded output, of which no two releases are quite the same - making it impossible to figure out their musical 'direction'; and partly because of the weird image they like to project, be it through the Hemingway-styled travel adventures of Rick Bishop, or the Burroughs-styled drug-addled sexually depraved fictions of Charles Gocher, the drummer. Gocher's outrageous fictions bolster the mythology of the band; where the lies leave off and the truth begins, nobody can say. But in sooth, there is much good humour behind it all, and the Girls (who rarely give interviews) are no doubt laughing their heads off at all the suckers who have fallen for their elaborate pranks. During my sojourn in Seattle, I was in the same room as Rick Bishop one smoke-filled evening and even strummed the guitar with him briefly in the informal quartet of which he's a member. He was affable as Huckleberry Hound. Those who know him well however, counselled against approaching him for a SCG interview. Not because he wouldn't co-operate, but what is there for him to say?

Five Go Down To The Sea?

The Glee Club

UNITED KINGDOM ABSTRACT RECORDS 12ABS 027 (1984)



A five-track EP from this absurdist (and short-lived) Irish group from the 1980s. Loved by John Peel, who frequently played their 1983 *Knot-A-Fish* EP on air, causing me to hunt high and low for a copy. I failed. It must have been issued in minuscule quantities; the only time I ever saw one was two years after the event, and it commanded a hefty collector's price then. You can imagine the alacrity with which I produced the required £3 when I espied *this* rarity. These guys could perhaps be lumped together with Stump, Bogshed and The Diagram Brothers, all UK combos who took the *Trout Mask Replica* 'sound' as a starting point and attempted to emulate it to one degree or another, with free-wheeling, angular guitars mismatched against totally irregular drum patterns, and loopy gibberish lyrics spewed on the top. Most of them couldn't match the underlying structure and discipline of the Van Vliet / French axis of course, either because they lacked technical skills to do it or didn't know it existed, but no matter - valiant efforts were made. This powerful slice of nonsense-genius promises plenty Rabelaisian black humour, as indicated by the sleeve art of a monstrous grinning stand-up comic with cigar and checked shirt, looking like one of Henry Holliday's late Victorian engravings from *Phantasmagoria*. Beside him is a baby Buster Keaton with a dummy in his mouth, wearing the trademark straw hat that he retained even for the end of his career and his appearance in Samuel Beckett's film. Five Go Down To The Sea? probably wished their music could have provided the missing link between Beckett and Beefheart; judge for yourself if they came close (if you can find any of their records, that is). This lot started as Nun Attax in Cork in the late 1970s, and were fronted by vocalist and visionary Finbarr Donnelly. This is one of the only three releases they made as the Five.

Kiss

Destroyer

USA PHONOGRAM PRICE 41 (1976)

Sheesh! Am I really ready to admit in public I own records by this dumb adolescent band? First The Moody Blues and now this...so much for *The Sound Projector*'s street cred. Wouldja believe I used to own the Casablanca original of this, which is a mid-price late reissue? It was the LP set to make Kiss into a reasonably credible rock band, as you can grok by the hallmarks of 'quality' on which their management saw fit to lavish thousands of bucks - recorded at the Record Plant in NYC by 'name' producer Canadian Bob Ezrin (he produced Alice Cooper), who put a full orchestra on track 'Beth', the drummer's lamentable attempt at a moving ballad, and a full orchestra AND voice choir on 'Great Expectations', Gene Simmons' greatest moment of stilted anthemic pomposity. Plus it has a sumptuous painted sleeve by Ken Kelley. I have no idea how this sold (as well as any Kiss record, I expect), but the band stupidly blew the deal and followed it up with two total klunkers - the pitiful studio LP *Love Gun*, and the double-live bundle of excess that is *Kiss Alive II*. The serious critics absolutely hated this dumb band, and probably still do. Of course Kiss have the last laff, as I gather even now they could fill a mega-stadium in the US at the drop of a phone call. Actually this isn't a bad LP (the track 'God Of Thunder' is particularly fine), although their best is *Kiss Alive!* - a double live LP which contains blistering versions of all the highlights from their first three (and strongest) studio LPs. Cost a mere £1, which is about three times what it's worth... □

Vox Humana

LET OTHERS HAMMER OUT THE BREATHING BRONZES

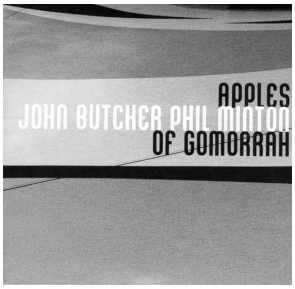
Martin Archer and Geraldine Monk

Angel High Wires

UNITED KINGDOM LA COOKA RATCHA LCVP149CD CD (2001)

Ernest juxtaposition of sung poetry and computer gimmickry. A lively palette of sound sources keeps my ear entertained. Lots of reverb like old 60s electronica with Julie Tippetts and others taking on the Cathy Berberian role. Steve Roden's falsetto is particularly haunting. Geraldine's words don't sing as well as they read and work best when used as a basis for the singer's vocal extemporizations. The dismally poor cover graphics do a great disservice to this fascinating disc.

ALASDAIR WILLIS



John Butcher / Phil Minton

Apples of Gomorrah

GERMANY GROB 429 CD (2002)

This set of 1999 studio sessions by seasoned improvisers Butcher and Minton is their first release as a duo, although they've recorded together before: *Two Concerts*, their collaboration with Erhard Hirt was favourably reviewed in *Sound Projector 5*.

As you may know, Butcher is a tenor / soprano sax player, and Phil Minton plays the 'voice'. Both take similar approaches to their chosen instruments; perfectly capable of playing them 'straight' according to their established musical functions, but just as likely to force them into making sounds for which they definitely weren't intended. And this is when Butcher and Minton's music is most interesting, as they fool your brain into thinking that someone's playing a completely different instrument (the piano for instance) or come together to make beautiful but ostensibly non-musical sounds.

Here's some of the images that came to mind whilst listening to this, all which I'm glad very glad to have 'heard': bats loose in the studio, someone cutting grass with giant secitaurs, a man having an incredibly difficult time waking up, a parrot sucking wet concrete through a straw.

Unfortunately *Apples of Gomorrah* isn't as good a record as *Two Concerts*. There's 17 shortish tracks and the duo footle around fairly fruitlessly (no pun intended) for at least half of them. Not that any of what they do is bad or painful, they just don't seem to connect very often - maybe there's too much space here for this particular pair of musicians to comfortably fill?

In most cases I was more taken by the whimsical titles of the tracks than the tracks themselves... 'Fairy Cheeses', 'Bachelor's Buttons' and 'Sauce Alone' all made me chuckle. The package also has a nicely appropriate apple-green cover which depicts the underside of a table in some hip futurist-designed café, the sort of place it would be nice to see them perform.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

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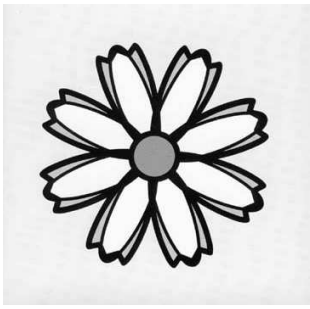
Cosmos

Tears

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 024 CD (2002)



It would be nice to think that Sachiko M and Ami Yoshida named their duo after The Cosmos, the two lovely fairy creatures (six inches high!) who appear in the original Godzilla movies whenever Mothra takes the screen, and sing their beautiful songs about the ecology. The present Cosmos sing of no ecological theme - rather, their theme is something to do with damaged emotions and careless love - but they are no less ethereal than their film counterparts. Here's a gorgeous CD of imperceptible vocal work and humming electronics.

Sachiko Matsubara, partner of Otomo Yoshihide, former member of Ground-Zero and a key player in his Filament trio and the larger Cathode ensemble, appears here with her familiar sine waves. Maybe it would be more accurate to state she barely appears, since if anything her 'empty sampler' trademark is more minimal than ever before. On the first long track for example, she shades in a light hum so gorgeously washed-out that it's planted even further in the background than background noise - the fridge in the house next door contributes more of a noticeable presence.

Ami, the originator of the 'howling voice' according to her web page, delivers vocalising in a style that's utterly unique. She recorded a solo CD *Spiritual Voice* in 1997 - and she continues to sing with synth-player Utah Kawasaki as Astro Twin. I'm a big fan of this vocal mode of improvising and have long been keen on the work of UK warblers Phil Minton and Vanessa Mackness, who both have strange interior landscapes that they have trained themselves to pour out of their mouths. What they do is still based (however remotely) on jazz - that Ella Fitzgerald scat-singing style, just rendered into something more abstract by way of Samuel Beckett (in Minton's case, at any rate). Ami's work is quite new. Partly composed of strangulated, silent screams, or slurping noises as though she were drinking a milkshake, it's beyond vocalising - and becomes pure sound. She french-kisses the end of the microphone with a passion that verges on obscene...her saliva glands work overtime, and the studio technicians come in with a bucket and a safety sign. French loon Henri Chopin, or 'rubber-lips' as I affectionately refer to him, is a veteran sound poet and microphone abuser who frequently uses his labial protruberances like percussive tools. Ami Y likewise produces a percussive effect, but I think it's by accident when her mouth, teeth and jaw brush against the sensitive microphone and interrupt the musical flow with an ungainly bump.

Tears? Yes, a tremendous sorrow flows beneath and imbues the sound. The first track matches precisely the long and interminable moods that many of us lonely manic-depressive types have suffered, where you remain paralysed with a nameless unhappiness and can't lift a finger to comfort yourself. At least it's a comfort to hear music as compassionate as this. The second cut is more of an adventure, like being eaten alive by fish in warm water. What other clues? The flower on the cover is pulled apart, petal by petal, in a simple Love and Hate poem. A metaphor for how human relationships are - the damage we do to each other (and ourselves) so thoughtlessly, and how it can't be repaired. Yet, even so - reduced to this nothingness, life still prevails - as the third cut will reveal. It could be taken as the dying song of a rare bird, the last of its species left on earth.

ED PINSENT 03/11/2002

www.erstwhilerecords.com

Shelley Hirsch

The far in, far out worlds of Shelley Hirsch

USA TZADIK TZ7705 CD (2002)

Unless you're familiar with Hirsch's previous work like *O Little Town of East New York*, you may not find much joy in this CD. While Hirsch is a fine singer with a good range and a surprising bag of tricks and vocal techniques, and the execution of the music is consistently good, the subject matter can be excruciatingly twee and cloying. The worst part of the CD (in my view) comes at the beginning in a suite of four songs centring on Hirsch's childhood pal Aida Vidzer and her family. Why Hirsch makes her friend's family the subject of several songs (indeed, the family was the subject of an entire CD Hirsch released some time around 1998) I'll never know. Listening to these songs, I feel too much like a voyeur and I learn things I'd rather not learn and which are superfluous anyway (do we need to know that Mr Vidzer is older than his wife by about twenty years?), which is a pity as the method of delivery (interview with Aida combined with background singing and music samples) is not bad and quite original.

After the Vidzer quartet, the standard rises astronomically (relatively speaking): in 'Club Enchantment' in particular, Hirsch proves her forte as a singer using funny voices and some extreme and unusual vocalisations - she may not be as great as, say, Joan La Barbara but then La Barbara probably had loads more training and practice. Hirsch is probably strongest in Middle Eastern - sounding chanting and ululations, and in singing lovey-dovey tunes like 'So Tender' and 'Blue Moon' where her lisp adds flavour but her speaking voice is good and effective too (there is a lot of spoken voice on this CD) once you get used to her New York accent and lisp. Of the post-Vidzer tracks, 'Club Enchantment' has the best singing, 'War of Dreams' has the best music (no singing here) and 'Sitting in a Room' is the weakest track all round: there's not much feeling in the less than outstanding singing and the music is a mere backdrop. I don't recommend this CD unless you really like Hirsch's work and don't mind the spoken voice pieces which dominate the singing. This is one recording where the standard of music and performance can't compensate for the weakness of much of the material.

JENNIFER HOR

www.tzadik.com

Hiroshi Kawani

Flashback

JAPAN PSF PSFD-130 CD (2002)

A nutsoid release from PSF, that infamous Japanese label that was the home of Tokyo Flashbacks, Keiji Haino and Musica Transonic, records whose very shellac I once felt unworthy to lick. This one is a marginal art-record extracted from the archives, along the lines say of their excellent reissue of the sound-sculptures records of Harry Bertoia, that loopy American out in his barn. On this, Hiroshi Kawani delivers an insane performance - or more accurately a warm-up to a performance. The record is a maddening voice thing, taking vocal art and taped concrete poetry (already a pretty extreme mode of expression) to even greater and loonier extremes.

HK was a truly right-on kind of guy, genuinely living the underground aesthetic to the full with every waking breath and every creak of his bones, since the 1950s. He was an active participant in various oppositional organisations in Japan in the 1960s, for example the Taisko Action Group and the Tokyo Activist Front. These groups, in line with their American and European counterparts, melded far-left political thought with artistic experiment - many exciting crossover and multimedia events followed (film, performance, music, visual arts). He was a friend and supporter of Genpei Akasegawa, an artist who was taken to court by the state for creating faked banknotes as artwork. Later, Kawani joined a publishing organisation, and among other things he arranged for the first Japanese translations of important 20th century avant poetry and texts (Artaud, Derrida, Bataille and other unreadable scribes). Then he challenged the establishment's art academy with his own Bigakkô school, a haven for radical lecturers, a breeding house for radical ideas, and a serious slap in the face to the traditional art academies of Japan.

His 'mouth work' began in 1982, when presumably he'd reached the point that he could no longer contain all the energy and ideas bubbling inside his skinny frame, and his mouth could not remain silent. He undertook a series of vocal performances, joined by his younger acolyte Toshi Tanaka. By then Kawani was 49. Concurrent with the performance series, there was an occasional event called Hiroshi Kawani's Freaky Talk. Further collaborations with artists and dancers followed. But by 1996, the consequences of his wild lifestyle were beginning to tell - the years of drug abuse had ravaged his body, he was in general poor health and started spewing blood on stage. He contracted Parkinson's disease and wound up in a wheelchair.

The record here is not a document of Hiroshi Kawani's Freaky Talk (unfortunately), nor indeed a proper performance - but a compilation of his rehearsal tapes from 1983, selected by free-jazz altoist Masayoshi Urabe from an enormous archive of cassettes, and presumably not intended for an audience. Kawani did these workouts as part of the daily warming-up exercise. What you hear is a light gargling and warbling noise, tongue splapping, swallowing, breathing, and talking in low monosyllables; he also squeaks and mutters in a very strange way. He had a table-top covered with bits of small junk (a contents list is provided in the booklet), including chopsticks, bottles of water, dice and rubber bands, all of which were brought into play in this oral extravaganza. (I'd like to meet his dentist!).

Reading about Kawani's exciting life leaves you in no doubt that he was fervently active in engaging with radical political ideas, and he passed the disease onto others through published texts, influencing young art students at his academy, and mainly through his outlandish performances. This radicalism may lead you to expect some kind of wild and crazy screeching. In fact it's surprising how quiet this record is. There's little very 'performative' about this private tape - it's more like an exploration of very small gestures, made large through amplification. It's also completely absurd - with no evident 'meaning' behind the performance, which makes it all the more important. Obviously I've no idea if these rehearsals were different to the actual performances, but either way this release has an endearing 'sketchbook' quality. It may sound to you like nothing more than a man rattling marbles in his mouth for an hour, but I love it. Extremely challenging, even if you like sound poetry and improvisation.

ED PINSENT 08/12/2002

Terada Bldg 2F, 2-45-11 Matsubara, Setagaya-Ku, Tokyo 156-0043, Japan

Howard Stelzer / Frans de Waard

"Torn Tongue"

GREECE ABSURD CDR #18 CD-R (2002)

Mildly interesting - this is the kindest verdict I can give to this rather silly experiment by Howard Stelzer and Frans de Waard, which is a process piece based on voice tapes and extensive treatments of said tapes. It's one very simple idea blown up to excessive proportions. Stelzer started with tapes he'd made of a gallery artist friend of his (known only as 'KS') and right away he became bogged down in what he terms the 'sonic qualities' of the source material. He then became further enmired as he forced artificial degradations onto the tape - re-recording, layering, loops, etc - all very ordinary and familiar actions which, for some reason, fascinated him even more. The waters were muddied even further when Frans de Waard was invited to join in, converting the extant mess into a digital stew and over-cooking it inside his computer. Some years later, this rag-bag of reheated ideas surfaced as *Torn Tongue*.

I'm infuriated by artists who coddle and preen themselves into a state of rapture over one very slight idea. *Torn Tongue* comes down to one thing - processing. You can do it with clunky cassette tapes, or computers (they did both), but I'm struggling to find any more meaning or depth in the finished results. It's a decent enough noise to listen to - rumbles, splinters, groans and whoors of sound, all ghostly traces of an original source which has been pummelled and deconstructed to the point where it becomes watery porridge. It's allowable that since patterns of human speech have been used to shape the work, there is something distinctive taking place underneath - you certainly couldn't get sounds like these using electronic instruments alone. But so what? Where's the content? What is it saying about language, speech, the human tongue? Very little, is the answer. What is it saying about the ego of Howard Stelzer? Read his banal, self-aggrandising texts and decide for yourself. In the artistic world-view of such buffoons, all human life is merely the starting point for an interminable, trivial, and inconclusive 'project'. Blahh.

ED PINSENT 22/10/2002

www.anet.gr/absurd

Free JAZZ

Die Enttauschung

Die Enttauschung
GERMANY GROB 426 CD
(2002)

Grob themselves seem to be surprised to be releasing this, a jazz CD, and very traditional jazz at that.

Die Enttauschung are Axel Dörner on trumpet, Rudi Mahall on bass clarinet and Uli Jennesen on drums and they cut their debut double LP in 1996. The following year they recorded this album, which is the best part of an hour taken up with the trumpet and bass clarinet hooting at the same pitch like owls defining their territory. Many of the tracks are Thelonious Monk compositions, from the era when the jazz heavyweights decided to get 'difficult' with themselves and their listeners, while the rest could most politely be described as 'filler' and sound not unlike Sun City Girls which, in this context, may not be a good thing.

The production throughout is subtle and it's all very muted and laid back despite the angularity of Monk's approach…but it's not really the jazz I like. There's none of the adventurousness of Miles Davis or the assault of Coltrane, it's just very restrained and….nice, for the caricatured polo-neck chin-stroking crowd who I'm sure will love it – though if they already have some Monk albums then why would they bother?

The sleeve notes are full of the usual over-explanation of their approach and technique that you usually see accompanying conceptual art and 'installations.' This is not necessary as it suggests a lack of belief in the music on the part of the musicians themselves, as if it can't stand up for itself. It also reads like total and utter bollocks: 'These techniques are interventions in the idea of how a trumpet should sound – namely, well tempered and bourgeois.' Yes, I kind of know what they're saying but what the fuck does it mean?

This just isn't my bag. It lacks the oomph of Mingus and the range of Sanders. Sorry to cite such familiar names but they're an example of how to make jazz truly happen. They helped turn an avowed metal-head like me onto jazz, like Die Enttauschung never could.

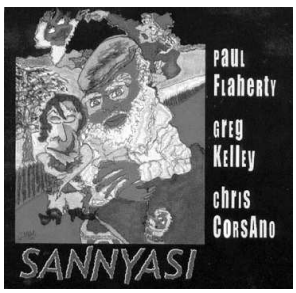
AND, this album has the worst cover I've seen for a long time. A little detail, I know, but in jazz it's the little details that count.

RIK RAWLING 23/12/2002

Alter Kölner Str 10, D-40699 Erkrath, Germany
head@churchofgrob.com
www.churchofgrob.com

Paul Flaherty / Greg Kelley / Chris Corsano

Sannyasi
USA WET PAINT 3001 CD
(2002)



This fine American contemporary sax-blaster first came our way with a set called *The Hated Music* in 2001, an excellent sax and drum record on Ecstatic Yod he made with drummer Chris Corsano. Here be another essential dose of free blurt played the way it should be - loud, long, and with utter conviction. Free jazz is an American language with its own brief but intense history, and its stories are told true by Flaherty with honesty and assurance. Corsano is in the drummer seat again, and Flaherty is joined by trumpeter Greg Kelley, another new face on the expanding New England scene who has recently been experimenting with a minimal trumpet record on the Rossbin label; but here, he makes jazz sounds together with his sax buddy in ways that resemble a John Coltrane-Don Cherry workout. How did this partnership come about? Simple...'I've been called to the music,' states Flaherty. 'I'm doing what I'm supposed to do...and I'm trying to work with like-minded souls.' The musical statements they make totally back this up. Flaherty again: 'Musicians surrender to the movement of the moment, the Eternal now, and find freedom from themselves, from each other - from concepts and outlines - from leaders and plans - the freedom to listen'. A stirring call to arms - an appealing agenda for freedom. I've been listening to free jazz since 1979, but unfortunately I'm still not free from leaders or plans. However, I am free to listen.

Seven studio improvisations, all long cuts, with metaphysical names like 'Cloud Of Unknowing', 'Wayless Way', 'Full Emptiness' and 'Secret Stair'. A pseudo-mystical quest is proposed, like that of Ornette, Pharoah Sanders, John McLaughlin or Sun Ra. Corsano's fast-moving skin work is every bit as good as Charles Moffett, Ornett's famous drummer. Kelley outdoes himself with joyous whoops or parpery-grumbling blats. Paul Flaherty just wails the whole time! After a one-two punch opening - 'Blood Whisper' and 'Cloud of Unknowing' are both high-energy sockeroos - comes 'Secret Stair', an eerie wailing / puffering blatnoid organism. Squeaks, heavy breath and swishing against bowed cymbals are just some of the effects on this mystery music. Then 'Full Emptiness' proposes its zen-like riddle title against a one-note droner musical amoeba, that grows into squonk-meistery, queasy throat-wobbles and a walk across the schooner's slippery decks. Grak.

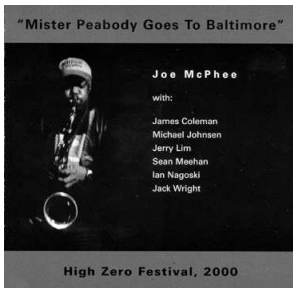
'Wayless Way' starts as a showcase of Greg Kelley's growling trumpet effects over a fantastic Corsano percussion backing of complexity and precision. Flaherty joins in after some minutes warbling on his alto sax like he's just travelled in time to the prehistoric past and brought back an extinct bird in a cage. It's gorgeous, alive music. The long closing track 'Patience of Fate' most clearly demonstrates the clarity of ideas and utter togetherness of these musicians - at 17:46 it's a marathon workout, but the runners pace themselves, with no detail fudged nor any note rendered less true by overblowing or excessive screaming effects; nothing added, nothing edited out, fully conscious music from start to finish. In all a grand free jazz fest, without any hint of 'forcing' a self-conscious revival or slavishly paying homage to the former glories of the 1960s. Great 'psychedelic beatnik' cover art painting by Flaherty too.

ED PINSENT 24/11/2002

PO Box 1024, Manchester, CT 06045, USA

Joe McPhee

"Mister Peabody Goes to Baltimore"
USA RECORDED / HIGH ZERO RECORDED 005 CD (2001)



Excellent documents of McPhee at work at a Baltimore Music Festival in 2000, joined here by friends and collaborators associated with a local scene in that town. Judging by this great release, some fine improv-jazz plus electronic combos were present there and many a groovy sesh went down. Sax and trumpet player McPhee has some experience of pairing his instruments with electronic players, as his topnotch jazz LPs on the HatArt label will attest - eg 1975's *The Willisau Concert*, with John Synder on snyth. Instead of 'powerhouse' free jazz noodling and pumping action, free-player McPhee has chosen a course that's far more strange, personal and indecipherable. Here, he virtually talks in tongues on the long first cut, 'Before The Fall', a biblical prophecy number where he jabbers and growls in holyman fashion in between wringing squeals from his pocket trumpet. Jack Wright carries on a reed dialogue with him and Ian Nagoski provides a low-key electronic murmuring. An astonishing 33-minute belteroid...no less bizarre is 'Night of The Krell', where Michael Johnson, with his saw and electronics, provides a metallic skeleton akin to a living scaffold of music, McPhee accordingly has

so much space to roam around here that he simply ladles his trumpet and sax blurtings into the cracks, like so much liquid glue..until percussionist Sean Meehan leads the exploit up a different golden path. The deeply resonant acoustics of this venue (the Visionary Arts Museum) add considerably to your enjoyment. 'Klatu' is almost the oddest track on offer here though, as two white geeks on guitar and Theremin (Jerry Lim and James Coleman respec) cause their auxiliary voices to behave like miniature howling monkeys, while McPhee matches their electric zaniness with true acoustic madness and still sounds the more authoritative of the group. Perhaps this is the most curious piece with its unpredictable dynamics (and ain't that how all improv oughtta be?) Then the CD closes with 'Homeless' - a street recording of Joe, made as he stood under a bridge letting the traffic sound lay down his rhythm track.

'His generosity and adaptability to eccentric situations...contributed greatly to the High Zero festival,' writes Stewart Mostofsky, as he sings the praises of this mighty puffsman. Locate and live with a copy of this little gem, sit spellbound for an hour, and you'll feel that generosity pour over you. Spin it again, and you'll feel you've met the man in the flesh.

ED PINSENT 06/11/2002

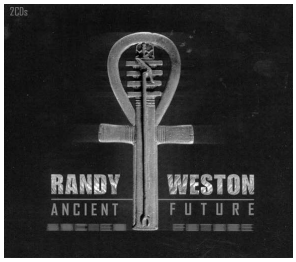
2732 St Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21218, USA
www.highzero.org
www.recorded.org

Randy Weston

Ancient Future / Blue

USA MUTABLE MUSIC 17508-2

2 x CD (2002)



The cover to this double CD is atrocious, which is a shame, as the music contained on these discs is exquisite. Solo piano throughout, extending on the most part from jazz standards and standard jazz styles. Randy always remains firmly within a melodic-rhythmic bracket but never just vamps or wallows in sentiment. His ideas twist and turn the music unexpectedly, trying things out, changing his mind, remembering something from elsewhere. His rhythms are constantly on the move. Decorative flurries hurry over seas of darkening chords whilst transforming into hesitant melodic motifs. I recommend ignoring the sleeve notes as they go on about his music being spiritually rooted in Africa. This is a little fanciful. There must be a link to Africa in this particular music genre, but jazz always sounds surprisingly unlike any African music of which I'm familiar. The second CD is a reissue of his 1984 album *Blue*.

ALASDAIR WILLIS

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Yo La Tengo

Nuclear War

USA MATADOR RECORDS OLE 5682

CD (2002)

Yo La Tengo have a history of absorbing their influences in public. FakeJazz.com described them as a 'living, breathing jukebox' and that's a fair observation when you consider the band's enormous repertoire of covers as well as their tendency to write material which seems to be overly inspired by one musician or another. But the reason we continue to care about them is that every now and then they surprise us with something uniquely their own. You've guessed it - this is one of those records.

And this is despite it being a cover, of Sun Ra's 'Nuclear War', originally recorded in 1982. They attack it with a vigour and flair sometimes lacking in their own self-penned material. According to biographer John Szwed, the song was Sun Ra's delayed response to the 1979 accident at the nearby Three Mile Island nuclear reactor, an incident which severely spooked the otherwise pro-technology Ra. I would guess that it's his most explicitly political rap; certainly it's a huge contrast to the weird and cosmic anti-racist metaphors found in songs like 'Space is the Place'.

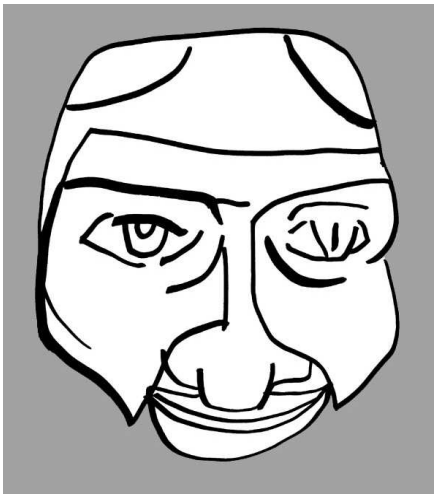
When artists make explicitly political art there's always the danger that they're attaching themselves to passing topical concerns which turn out, in the long run, to be without basis (Where's the acid rain falling now, protest singers of the 80s?) I bet you a depleted fish stock of your choosing that at least some of the prophetic messages of global doom peddled by modern politicos will seem as naive and misguided in 50 years as 'Duck and Cover' pamphlets do now. As far as 'Nuclear War' is concerned, well let's face it, the threat of nuclear armageddon doesn't hold quite the same grip on people's imaginations that it did during the latter stages of the cold war when Sun Ra recorded his original. But despite all this, Sun Ra's words of protest still hold true, because he was clever enough to pare his message down to the timeless essentials - there's just no arguing the truth of 'when you push that button... you can kiss your ass goodbye'.

Already a very funny political rap, 'Nuclear War' gets further played for laughs in the hands of Yo La Tengo who, on one of the four versions here, get children to take the place of the Arkestra in the song's characteristic Sun Ra call-and-response. Some people who've heard this have tut tutted at the irresponsibility / immaturity of YLT encouraging children to chant 'nuclear war - it's a motherfucker!' (and I guess if you were so inclined you could also find Georgia's brief impersonation of a black person 'problematic', but then...that would just make you an asshole). But it's just in the grand (if infrequent) tradition of songs like The Cramps' 'People Ain't No Good'. The kids strike a great knowing / bored pose when replying 'Yeah' to calls of 'Nuclear War!' but also bring a completely appropriate Sesame Street-style joyousness to lines like 'what you gonna do / when you've got no ass?'.

And if Yo La Tengo recognise the peculiarity of singing about nuclear war in 2002, they certainly treat the music with the seriousness and respect it deserves. The percussion that's the main feature of the song is just amazing - Georgia Hubley has come on a long way from the days when Yo La Tengo were a straightforward indie band, and appears to have learnt plenty by hanging around with free jazzsters such as Susie Ibarra (who appears on track 3), propelling the track forward with a clattering insistent shuffle. Bassist James McNew takes the lead vocal, which is a good thing as his voice is more lilting and expressive than usual singer Ira Kaplan's sometimes mannered and Lou Reed-derived drawl, and fits the song like a snug mitten. And rather than take on material that's beyond their capabilities, YLT have the sense to recruit genuine jazz musicians to help them out on when they do 'Nuclear War' the free jazz way; in this case members of overlapping combos Resonance and Other Dimensions in Music (at least one of whom, Daniel Carter, played with Sun Ra). The resulting ensemble fills out the sound with lolloping bass drum rolls and archetypal jazz piano chords, then rides roughshod over it with wild and twitchy horn solos.

Four versions of the same song would normally be over-egging it, but the CD works best when listened to in one 37-minute sitting, as the different interpretations complement each other and build to a satisfying whole. There's a straight version, the aforementioned kids and free jazz interpretations, and a dance remix - YLT's record label Matador must be chuffed to bits to have so many demographics covered.

Indeed, with 'Nuclear War', Ra was convinced that he had finally a hit on his hands, wrongly as it of course turned out. Yo La Tengo likewise released their version to coincide with the pre-festive shopping period, solving the Christmas present-buying problem for many of us, but getting them nowhere near an appearance on *Top of the Pops*. But I'm sure if you examine retail statistics closely, add in all the shops whose sales figures don't contribute towards the charts, and disqualify two or three hundred singles based on whatever snotty aesthetic/moral criteria you choose, you'll find that this was in fact the Christmas 2002 number one. Whatever the case, there's no doubting, IT'S A MOTHERFUCKER!



HARLEY RICHARDSON

Other Jazz-related music in the Improvisation Section

Maladroit rhythms of ROCK

Audioslave

Audioslave

USA EPIC 5101302 CD (2002)

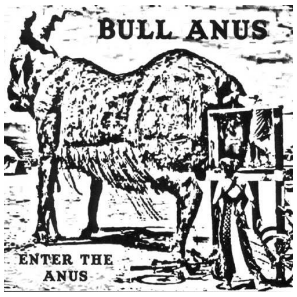
Much has been made of this band and the subsequent album. Old farts like me get off on the idea of the voice from Soundgarden and the fusion reactor that powered Rage Against The Machine joining forces to make something that will show these 'nu-metal' ladyboys a thing or two about how to 'rock'. And then there are those self-same ladyboys, many of whom whose balls have only recently dropped and think The Libertines are a brave and original act. So who's right?

Well, I will admit to the fact this album could have done with about 3 less songs, the 3 songs that just don't sound fully formed or are too much like other tracks on the album to really have any justification other than as 'filler' to beef this release up into suitably 'epic' proportions. And, yes, some of these songs do veer well away from the path RATM were renowned for and into bluesy AOR territory, something the guys should be commended for trying but somehow don't seem too comfortable with. But, having said that, when they rock, they ROCK. Like bastards. Like bastard sons of bitches. Cornell's got the screeches and growls going on, Tommy C is using his bass as an M-16 in imitation of John Rambo at the end of 'First Blood' and his virtuosity on the guitar is, as always, unique without resorting to the fatuous fret-wankery of Eddie Van Halen. Tracks like the single 'Cochise', 'Exploder' and 'Set It Off' sound formidable when you crank it up loud and they're offset against mellower, more introspective songs like 'In The Last Remaining Light' and the soulful 'I Am The Highway'. As I said, there are a couple of songs that re-define the term 'filler' but I understand why they were there - to give this project the weight it deserves in the eyes of a media increasingly distracted by passing fads.

Its detractors will slag this exercise off for all the reasons I like it. Bloated, hoary, Jurassic. Compared with Squarepusher it does sound like the mating sounds of Brontosaurs – but what the fuck is wrong with that? There should be no shame in getting off on something like this. So stop being so upset by the Styx-like cover 'concept', stop moaning about the slick Rick Rubin production. And stop pointing out that Chris Cornell likes to sing songs about the sun (yeah, all 2 of 'em). If you want pointless haircut bands, take your pick. If you want to resurrect the spirit of prime Led Zep and blast some of the wax out of your ears in the process, this is all you need.

RIK RAWLING 16/12/2002

www.epicrecords.com
www.audioslave.com



Bull Anus

Enter the Anus

USA MANDRAGORA RECORDS MR-6 CD-R (2001)

What bunch of wags are responsible for this devastatingly hilarious effort? Seems like it's 'Old Bull Lee' and 'Anus Moses' who we have to thank. The promotion for this album states that the men involved 'explore the touching emotions of love and loss through the healing power of song.' They attempt this through tracks with titles like 'Anthrax Ripple', 'Anus Strain'. 'Snot Rocker' and 'Don't Sit Down'. Track after track of horrible shrieking noise with slight variations in what the noise is actually made up of. Is it a car engine misfiring? Is it an industrial drill falling down a manhole? Is it a helicopter crashing into a steel mill? Does it matter?

They seem to be forgetting that Merzbow himself is already more prolific than an entire

Always keep medicines out of the reach of children
Always take prescribed medicines in accordance with a doctor's directions
Always keep medicines in tightly - closed containers and in a cool dry place
Never share prescribed medicines with others
Never hoard medicines - take unused medicines to a pharmacist
Never transfer medicines from the original container to another

gulag of noise musicians and is still going strong. And, when he does it he brings a sense of art and drama to the job – and turns his kit up really loud. If you're going to offer up noise as your creative response then at least have the balls to be LOUD with your noise.

Bull Anus are not loud enough. They have the kit, they have the track titles and they have the sheer perversity of will to drag it out for 70 minutes but they are not loud enough. They have enough of a trace of creativity to think about adding things like 'beats' into the destruction but they are not loud enough. And it's clear that they had a good time making it and obviously enjoy subjecting themselves to this bed-of-nails experience but THEY ARE NOT LOUD ENOUGH. And noise music should be loud. Really fucking loud. Otherwise what's the point?

Afficionados of the noise aesthetic may be able to discern a vast range of influences here – anything from SPK to Whitehouse to

Skullflower – but it's sad to imagine the black t-shirt crowd indulging in the same *Mojo* conversations about 'lineage' and 'tradition'. It should be just noise. The same noise you get every day when you walk down a busy city street or wait in a train station, only this requires an outlay of money and time and a willingness to participate as 'audience' for the genii who created it. That's what it's all about – the reduction of the act of listening to music to something so debased and perverted that it collapses into pointlessness.

RIK RAWLING 24/10/2002

Mandragora Records, PO Box 936, Northampton, MA 1061, USA
info@mandragora.com
www.mandragora.com

Death in Vegas

Scorpio Rising

UNITED KINGDOM CONCRETE RECORDS 74321954592 CD (2002)

Death In Vegas –a great name for a band and a great idea of what the ultimate 'cool' band should be – nothing more and nothing less than the sum of its influences. However, in the quest for that most protean of concepts – 'cool' – some things like heart, like passion, like meaning what you say, get lost in the rush to keep one step ahead of the alleged zeitgeist. This is what has kept DIV from ever being a great band and judging by this latest album it dogs them still.

Their first album was a real mish-mash of styles and ideas, many poorly executed, but when they got it together on tracks like 'Dirt' they suggested that there was more here than some nifty kit and a record collection that *Mojo* would approve of. The follow-up 'The Contino Sessions' was better, but suffered from a uniformity of approach. It was as if they had put their equation on paper:

Creation Records + AC/DC = Sales AND Kudos

Velvet Underground + Neu

and realised that, fucking hell, it was going to work!

And it did, for as long as the media and the faddists were going to be interested, which in this day and age is never very long. There's always something else to be seen to be into and a black leather meld of rock riffs, dub fuzz and narcoleptic beats is only going to be acceptable for one semester at the most. And trotting out a line-up of guest vocalists that ranges from Bobby Gillespie and Iggy Pop to Fearless' girlfriend Dot Allison is only going to bolster the arguments against them being anything other than an arch-exercise in pose, designed and executed by people who only feel comfortable lurking in the dark shadows of clubs, all the while still yearning for the bright lights.

Undaunted they have come back with what's described as a more 'upbeat' album. It's certainly more eclectic but the frantic appropriation of styles and tricks continues at a pace. This ensures nothing gets dull but sometimes they grab a handful of gold and sometimes they grab a turd – the faecal offering this time around being a misguided cover of 'So You Say You Lost Your Baby' performed with the dubious assistance of Paul fucking Weller which sounds wholly inappropriate alongside the sublime heroin nursery rhyme of 'Diving Horses' or the Neu-esque 'Leather/Girls'.

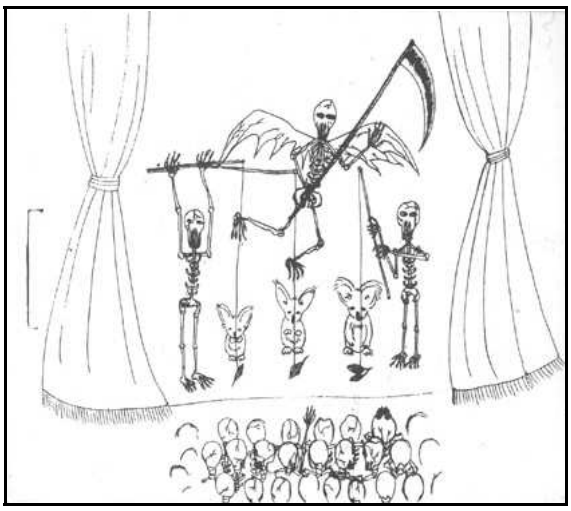
The title track is also a mis-step – chucking in some curry house strings over a Liam Gallagher drawl only succeeds in producing a bad Oasis b-side. But I'm inclined to forgive them their trespasses when they finally offer up 'Help Yourself' which features Hope Sandoval on orgasmic angel vocals and the band (who put in as much effort as the two lead Vegas boys and deserve equal credit) firing on all cylinders in a 10 minute epic that should sound fantastic live and have every one of those black-clad wallflowers stumbling out of the shadows to join the mass of sweating joyous bodies in celebration of hope and possibility.

With each album they edge ever closer to their true potential – that of a genuine band, not some style mag concept let loose on Halloween night with the right haircut and shades on. I recommend a CD-R compilation of the best tracks from their 3 albums – then you've got something really special. For now, DIV continue to frustrate with their inconsistency but inspire with their willingness to TRY to fashion something different. When they're truly in the zone they seem capable of absorbing their powerful influences and re-interpreting them in their own style.

So many other acts currently championed as the 'saviours of rock & roll' (as if it were some hapless damsel in perpetual distress) could learn a lot from following their example.

RIK RAWLING 21/10/2002

http://www.concreterecords.com/
http://www.continorooms.com/



Deerhoof

Live "Koalamagic"

AUSTRALIA DUAL PLOVER COH4444 CD (2001)

Always wanted to hear Deerhoof ever since Lucas Abela proclaimed how much he 'loved that band'. As it turns out, this release which he saw fit to put out on his own Dual Plover label is passable enough - Deerhoof turn out to be a trio comprising Satomi on vocals and bass, John on guitar and Greg on drums, although an earlier 1996 incarnation of them here sees them as a somewhat different five-piece. They play basic energetic garage punk songs and toons, livened up with a spicy twist from singer Satomi, who comes over as fairly loopy and demented; every squeal that leaps from her throat is like a swanee whistle, or a cheap plastic toy version of a police siren. This CD contains a long 20-minute performance of seven songs in a live suite from 2000, plus four shorter cuts. While the band are competent enough as quirkoid musicians - 'Insist' is an instrumental guitar and bass dialogue that is adequately warped - their real strength resides in the strange voice and stories and songs of Satomi. She either scat-sings nonsense syllables, goes 'ba ba ba' like a lobotomised Beach Boy, or tells child-like tales of curious animals on tracks like 'Come see the duck', 'The Pickup bear', 'God save the Queen bee' and 'Queen Orca Wicca Wind'. Appealing enough combo of elements in the package, but despite this whimsically dark eccentric approach and engaging odd doodle art on cover, Deerhoof aren't quite as exotic as you might think.

ED PINSENT 24/12/2002

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Do Make Say Think

and Yet and Yet

CANADA CONSTELLATION CST020 CD (2002)

DMST here have opted for a style more ambient and spacey and less jazz-oriented than on their previous album *Goodbye Enemy Airship the Landlord is Dead* and the music is looser, warmer and more positive, even uplifting at times. The drumming is as crisp as ever, possibly too much so when the rest of the music indicates a quiet or thoughtful direction, and the guitar textures can still be pretty raw; but the musicians attempt to explore new moods and territory, though not always successfully.

The best track is 'End of Music' for its raw guitar and the burst of joyful music in the style of Godspeed You Black Emperor! (I imagine DMST have had it up to here with GYBE! comparisons so maybe I shouldn't mention That Other Band from here on unless it's absolutely necessary.) Most of the other tracks are OK:

'White Light Of' is a bit too loud for what I think it's trying to do and the dynamics don't seem well controlled, and 'Chinatown' moves too quickly for listeners to savour the mood while 'Reitschule' gets the balance of mood, dynamics and flow about right. The weakest track is the uninspired 'Soul and Onward' which features insipid female vocals. The last track 'Anything for Now' (even the title spells 'filler material') is a repetitive piece saved only by its balmy laidback atmosphere and the nice guitar waterfall trilling at the end which is attached to the rest of the piece by the flimsiest of umbilical c(h)ords.

I don't rate this album to be as good as *Goodbye Enemy Airship ...* though the standard of playing is high - it's just that there are tracks here that don't do DMST justice and they need all the justice they can get from their music so that people will stop comparing them to That Other Band ...

JENNIFER HOR

www.cstrecords.com

Do Make Say Think

and Yet and Yet

CANADA CONSTELLATION CST020 CD (2002)

Autumn is my favourite time of year. The slow subtle shift from hazy baked out Summer afternoons to the chill dusk of September is something I've always enjoyed ever since I was a kid. When the July heat seems to get all the twats excited, thus causing them to take to the streets in the convertible Dick-extensions with stereos blaring car thief soundtracks, I prefer to stay inside and wait for the blackberries to ripen and the pond to fill up with leaves.

It's the only season that suits my perpetual mood and I've now finally found the perfect soundtrack for it – though, to be honest, you can't beat the breeze through the trees and birdsong and the music of nature that man in all his glorious ineptitude will always be playing catch-up against – but Do Make Say Think comes a close second.

Their first album was released in the wake of the initial furore surrounding godspeed you black emperor but apart from being on the same label there really is no connection between the two bands whatsoever. Ok, so they're both Canadian and both play largely instrumental pieces but that's it. Many have looked for a comparison but there really isn't. DMST plough their own furrow and it's one that's less sad, less desperate, less strident, less bleak – but no less beautiful. If gybe! is the mountain caught in a storm, DMST are a river in the forest, dappled with shade, holding secrets in the shadows.

The aforementioned (self-titled) first album and its follow–up, *Goodbye Enemy Airship the Landlord is Dead*, were both classic examples of a band doing its growing up in public. They clearly had talent to spare and on the tracks that really worked you knew this was a band with something special in them, if they could just somehow take control of their influences. They went from stylistic lurches to grab-bag appropriation of jazz dynamics and somewhere along the way matured, enabling them to make *And Yet And Yet*, their masterpiece and an album that will, of course, be overlooked by all those utterly irrelevant end-of-year polls by the magazine muppets – but who cares? Better that it doesn't flash up on the radar of haircut-obsessed fools, leaving them free to do their own thing and do it as well as this.

Seven tracks in all, each carefully considered and arranged to develop the overall mood of the album, which is one of sadness and hope and realisation of the simple pleasures. They use guitars, drums, keyboards, brass, found sound and the occasional vocal and that's about all you need to know. It is so much of a complete work that it's pointless to break down each track according to what influences might be in there and what relevance the title might have; that should be wide open to the interpretation of the listener which, let's face it, is all part of the experience.

All I can tell you is this album sends me through the fields behind my parents' house, down an empty stretch of the M62 I late at night with rain having just fallen, along the streets of San Francisco's Chinatown as the sun rises above the alleyways and storefronts, to the beach at East Sook on Vancouver Island where I once sat on a driftwood log and saw the moon in a blue sky above a snow-capped mountain. And, ultimately, it sends me back to when I was 16, laid on my back under an oak tree at dusk with a head full of cheap lager and the wind in the leaves above me as the night grew darker and the stars one by one began to shine through and I wondered if life would ever get this good ever again?

And if DMST can send you like that then what the hell other reason do you need to buy this album? It's cheap, it's lovingly packaged and every purchase represents another small rusty nail in the Moby-Dick-sized coffin of the 'music industry' we know and loathe.

RIK RAWLING 30/09/2002

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Ectogram

Tall Things Falling

UNITED KINGDOM ANKST CD100 CD (2002)

First off, respect to Ectogram for their involvement a couple of years ago in the Anglo-Welsh collaborative freakout that was The Serpents, whose album *You Have Just Been Poisoned By* (also on Ankstmusik) remains a fantastic highpoint of the emancipation of Welsh psychedelia during the '90's. Mysterious, playful, laconic, it's a record that seems to invite the listener into a hitherto obscure plane of reality wherein psilocybin druids groove to Krautrock ragas in rituals designed to reawaken the pagan imagination of Europe. To me it seems kind of karmically apposite that at the dawn of the 21st century (by Christian reckoning, at any rate) Wales should be in this position vis-à-vis the fresh, ancient blueprints upon which our Western culture is founded- criminally derided as a cultural backwater for so long, there is undeniably something in the rain-lashed pessimism of the Welsh folksoul that gleams brighter than the hubristic sheen we find coating our officially-sanctioned UKonsciousness, and it is this precious quicksilver that carries the seeds of regeneration and mythic revivification. Hence, respect to Ectogram, an Anglesey-based three-piece of no little renown who have been around for ten years or more, although it seems that recent releases such as *All Behind The Witchtower* (2000?) have seen their profile rise steadily. I must confess, I hadn't heard of them, but as I don't pay much attention to anything ever, that's hardly surprising.

Having made such grandiose claims, allow me to spoil the moment totally by admitting I struggled to really enjoy this recording much as I might struggle to enjoy attending a health-farm: yes I probably *am* shamingly unfit, I *do* eat a lot of greasy music and I probably didn't listen enough to Soft Machine during my formative years, and yes I expect the austerity of *Tall Things Falling* is doing wonders for my arterial flow, but it's a definite watch-checker (as in, when can I go home?)- fibrous, gnarled, biscuity, brown (like rice), raw (as in uncooked, not 'MTV Unplugged' music-industry 'raw'), like being gently but insistently force-fed slivers of turnip by very soft, very heavy invisible children. It's peculiar, then, that the press release for this record is so gung-ho about painting this music in terms of its 'lush permaculture', 'a leafy frondescence of fresh verdant sound retaining all the zest of springtime'. I can get with the 'green and tangled tendrils' I guess- there is something suggestive of the vegetable imagination here, you can hear it in the churning faceless squashiness of Alan Holmes' guitar and its rhizome fungus unriffs, as well as in the songtitles of course- 'Prime Plant Locks', 'Black Lime Tree', 'Spring Without Green'. But I don't hear much in the way of cyclic renewal. And there are no flowers anywhere to be seen. Twig power? If you say so, Ectogram, but I

don't think I'll be painting my face and dancing on Primrose Hill in commemoration of the dawn of the Age of Aquarius to the accompanying sound of your latest record.

Perhaps the label's reference to 'post-tonal melodies' best explains my reservations…'Post-melodic melodies' might be closer to describing my experience of the weirdly meandering eddies of girlnoise emanating from the thorax of Ann Matthews. If, say, Aretha Franklin was a rampaging silverback gorilla charging towards you and bellowing furious gospel, you could (if you were quick enough) grab an aerosol container and squirt a vapourized Ann Matthews into her foam-flecked mouth- it would immediately freeze the Queen of Soul's ardour into mute atheism, such is the dryness it brings. But over the duration of the CD this dryness begins to enflame mucus membranes and upset sensitive pets.

Some soundalikes? Oh, go on then- Yo La Tengo *sans* tunes- a pastoral Dead C *avec* tunes (stretching it a bit, but we'll press on regardless)- certain nuances of early My Bloody Valentine, if you squint at it- something about the feel of the thing reminds me of Caravan or some other Canterbury prog thing, then again I'm going to completely contradict myself and claim the whole thing vibes me up inna '80's style- would it be impolitic to mention C86? Probably, and I'm sorry if it causes offence. Some highlights- well the guitar noises are pretty impressive throughout in a seething, tubercular sort of way- echoes of Kevin Shields on 'Kindling', rocking out in a manner not unlike Makoto Kawabata on 'Prime Plant Locks', feeding back a la Michael Karoli on the rather groovy 'Black Lime Tree'. At times the veridian guitar-hexes push beyond mere atonality toward ripping scabs from the lips of a syphilitic king- and I dig it- but I'm still left wanting more: more rock abuse, more mud, more shit, more blood, more winter. And perhaps a little less of the studied dryness- the bass on this record sounds like it's being played by a seagull.

For all my reservations, something in me warms to *Tall Things Falling* and I feel broadly supportive of and interested in Ectogram's artistic credo, much as I take a substantive degree of personal solace and good cheer from the existence of labels like Ankstmusic and their roster of artists- it can only be a good thing.

JONATHAN HELLIER

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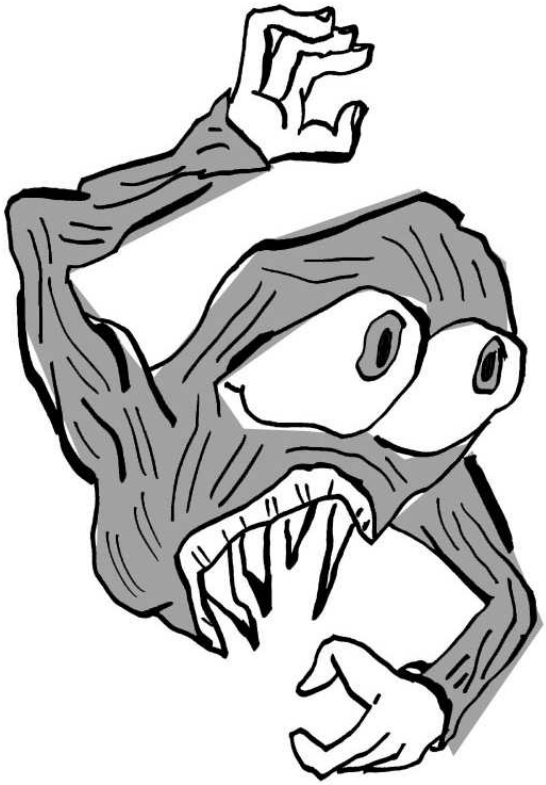
Godspeed You Black Emperor!

Yanqui U.X.O.

CANADA CONSTELLATION CST0 CD (2002)



U.X.O – as in 'UneXploded Ordnance', as in 'unfriendly bombs', both real and psychic, dumped on us from a great height by the bastard death eagle that is the USA's War Machine. A diagram on the back of this album draws connections between the 'acceptable' face of mass consumerism and other companies entangled in the tentacles of the Beast, companies like Raytheon Industries, who make those Tomahawk Cruise missiles that look so amazing on CNN. More than anything what this diagram illustrates is that it's nigh on impossible for us, the common people, to deny these bastards the thing they need the most – our cash – because the foetid black tentacles of their empire reach so far that literally every purchase we make is a tiny contribution towards their idea of what they think we want: a world that looks like Dawson's Creek or Notting Hill (the film, that is) – with a few well-scrubbed European cities to visit and maybe the odd ghetto (painstakingly reconstructed in a studio) to film a 30-second 'news' report about, thus allowing some vent to those lingering pangs of guilt. They've already pretty much succeeded with the 'Global Teen' project and if they remain unchecked then we'll all soon be able to live in the 'Bland of Opportunity' – as long as we can afford it that is.

The frustration this manipulation of our lives, our socities and our cultures by 'The Fuckers' ™ is something almost tangible – you can see it shimmering over the cities at night, like some bilious variation on the Northern Lights. Even the most pliant and acquiescent of consumer drones must feel some nagging dissatisfaction with their lot but what can any of us do about it? The only way to stick to your principles in all of this is to go all out – run for the hills and live in a Wig-Wam in the Welsh mountains – but we all know what lies at the end of that route – 2 words: Ted Kaczynski. Then again, maybe millions of dangerously-unhinged Unabombers is what it will take to bring it all down?

Or maybe we just pull the duvet over our heads and hope tomorrow will be better?

It's that same frustration and anger and despair that informs every note recorded on this CD. I've been critical of the political bleatings of Godpseed You Black Emperor (and A Silver Mt.Zion) in the past but, call it a 'change of mind', call it 'maturity' – whatever it is I've gradually come round to their way of thinking. Not that I didn't already share their views, it's just I doubted the point of wrapping their music in such overt statements. But I now see that there would be NO music without those feelings, without that sense of frustration at what the Blind Idiot God of Greed is doing to our communities and our souls and, in the lack of anything else that can be done to fight this demented villain, they've chosen to hammer out their emotions via live performance and the occasional CD – which becomes a shared experience for all who go along to the gigs or buy the albums and, if you're into it, becomes a shared catharsis. And in a world where people feel ever more detached from the humanity that their DNA insistently reminds them they are part of, this is something we all need.

So, to the new album. It's disheartening to see so many music journalists inferring so much significance in the moving of an exclamation mark. On the inner sleeve, the band name appears as Godspeed You! Black Emperor.

Why should this matter? What inference is to be made from what may well be a typo left in specifically to distract the idiots who still don't get it? Elsewhere in the same notes the band is referred to as 'God's Pee' and I've not seen anyone stirring a conspiracy up around that. The enigmatic façade, that has been created around this band (in the absence of any press packs, glossy photos and sew-on patches for your school satchel) continues to bemuse reviewers, pifflers and music journalists alike who have all desperately attempted to define what this band is about and what it purports to represent ….and their words have all been lost in the howling wind of their own obsolescence. The band won't play by the game rules so the media muppets invent reasons for their unwillingness to play ball.

Words cannot define something like this. This isn't The Datsuns or The Strokes or anything so easily categorised and marketed. Even what I'm saying here is essentially pointless when faced with the reality of their music. It either moves you or it doesn't. You either think it's awesome…or King Crimson, gone wrong. End of the debate.

Still, some of the criticisms levelled at their last album, the 2-disc *Levez Vos Skinny Fists Comme Antennas to Heaven*, seem to have got through. Yes, it was sprawling. Yes, it was bloated beyond comfort. Yes, it was gratuitously self-indulgent and we could have well done without all the drones and the dead space – but some people took it as a sign that the band had 'gone Pink Floyd', disappeared up their own arses and ultimately made themselves redundant in the process. The music press was doing its classic build 'em up/knock 'em down within the usual 3 year

period that they allow any band to be 'relevant'. Surely it was obvious to these morons that gybe! were never involved in the Crap Carnival of 'Cool'?

Nevertheless, on this new album they have trimmed away all the fat, all the extraneous fuzz and phantom voices, and concentrated totally and utterly on the music that they have to make. Produced by Steve Albini, the band clearly benefit from having someone at the desk who knows how to focus their continent-wide sound into something more direct, more engaged and more potent. They seem to have taken 'World Police & Friendly Fires' (from *Skinny Fists*) as their starting point because all 3 pieces sound like a storm coming down on the mountains, intent on destroying both the villagers huddled in their shacks and the baron in his castle. They really do sound like they absolutely mean it and in some ways it's like hearing the band again for the first time. You re-experience the shock of the new and the joyous life-affirming sense of discovering something that seems to intuit your feelings and express them for you. Freed from the pre-millennial associations with Armageddon that accompanied their first releases, they are free to almost redefine themselves.

My copy of the album came via an mp3 download cut to CD-R, weeks before the initial release date. With zero hype surrounding this release (like I said, the music press now consider them old hat and think we need to be concerned about something as pointless as Nirvana's Greatest Hits) it felt like I could approach this without expectation. And these are the words I wrote down on my initial listen to the whole album:

Brooding. Malevolent. Wagnerian. Haunted. Volatile. Incendiary.

'1-15-00' (previously referred to on live setlists as '12-28-99') is the most 'restrained' of the tracks, shifting through several moods and shades, like the ocean under a storm sky. It still reaches the expected roaring crescendo but not before confounding anticipations. With no tramp ramblings or radio fuzz, it rings out unadulterated, like the soundtrack to a life lived hard.

'Rockets Fall on Rocket Falls' is like Hall of the Mountain King re-scored by Metallica. It chimes discordant when it reaches its peak but after 20 minutes of gathering darkness it's the only thing that would work.

But it's 'Motherfucker=Redeemer' that will be the standout track for everyone and is quite possibly their masterwork, just about eclipsing the power and passion of *Slow Riot for New Zero Kanada*. It starts with tiny bell chimes like rain falling on ice and grows to monolithic proportions until it seems at one point there is a legion of guitars at play. Bollocks to Branca's guitar symphonies, this has all that power and relentlessness but uses surging chords rather than atonal bluster to hammer itself through to the side of your soul you normally keep well hidden behind irony and bluff and lies. After an early peak it hangs like mist in a deserted street, a guitar chiming like a phone ringing in a booth that no-one will answer, not even the drunk huddled inside for shelter, before lifting off towards another pounding crescendo that is counter-pointed by a simple chord repeated like a mantra to ward off the encroaching forces of darkness.

This is not the soundtrack to the end of the world postponed. As bleak and harsh as it is at times, they don't rely on the strings (as they have in the past) to lighten the load, and what results is something that is huge, mightily pissed off but not without hope. With the world around us going slowly, steadily insane – bombers, snipers, and madmen at the helm – we need our art, our 'distractions', to try to help us render some kind of sense out of it all.

And right now, I can't think of anything else better than this.

RIK RAWLING 21/11/2002

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The Heads

Under Sided

UNITED KINGDOM SWEET NOTHING RECORDS SNCD011CD (2002)

Fucking Hell, it's The Heads! For the best part of 10 years they have been Bristol's, and Britain's best band. That's right, the BEST band we have to offer the world. Better than The fucking Strokes. Better than The fucking Datsuns. And better than any other bunch of twats you care to name. So all you student failures lumbering away in your bedsits pissing off the neighbours and all you Vauxhall League garage band wannabes with your vintage leather jackets and your crow's arse hair-dos might as well just give up now. Because no matter HOW hard you try you aren't even going to come close to matching the transcendental cosmic majesty of The Heads. Having said that, if fuzzed-out guitar thunder blasting from the loins of the bastard sons of Hawkwind, Can and Blue Cheer is not your thing then you're just NOT ever going to get it. This is not a band for anyone with a rhythmic bone in their body, but that's not to say they haven't got the groove – it's just very hard to dance to eye-of-the-hurricane guitar oblivion, unless you count the kind of spastic reeling inspired by too much Strongbow and a face-full of strobe lights.

Now surely something this good would have rocked the entire world off its axis by now? And if it hasn't, why not? I'm sure you don't need me to point out that true genius is rarely graced with financial rewards and that we live in a world where the dumbest buy the mostest but perhaps the best explanation for their lack of commercial success (though all their albums are critically acclaimed and genuine 'cult' favourites amongst those who know their shit from their sugar) is the fact that they have defiantly flown in the face of fashion - in their time seeing grunge, Brit-pop, post-rock, ironic metal and the current garage re-hash completely pass them by completely.

For The Heads the time is always 'NOW': past, present and future condensed into a moment of transcendence, decorated with the best of late 60's psychedelia and throbbing in time to the grubby heart of the almost forgotten British underground scene. But they are defiantly NOT a revivalist act – they've taken the best of what that period had to offer and made it their own. A Heads track is unmistakable – each one starts like Thunderbird 2 rumbling out of the cave and onto the launch pad, and then BOOM! off it goes. There are echoes of their influences on display but after nearly a decade on the job they are now such consummate professionals that they can even do a cover version (witness 'For Madmen Only' on the *Sucking the 70s* compilation) and make it sound like only something they could have done.

And what's perhaps even more amazing is that these 4 men are not a professional band, in the sense that the band is their career. They all have day-jobs – teacher, record shop owner, IT – and this has helped to keep them grounded where many other young fools have taken the big advances and shoved 'em up their noses. This album, their fourth (or the third if you don't count the *Man's Ruin* compilation of single and EPs as a 'proper' album), is their most controlled set to date – though I must admit to preferring the absolutely unstoppable 78 minute 'Everyone Knows We Got Nowhere', if only for its sense of escalating madness. They've never sounded tighter than they do here and it's the first time you can really hear all the lyrics, which now reveals their songs to be even stranger than you ever thought before. 'A glass pistol is not a gun', 'Fanta ashtray, you're my piece of clay', 'And as the metal wings I'm running out of strings.' What the fuck are they on about? Well, part of the fun is trying to figure that out.

They've also had a canny ear for the best spoken-word samples, which they use to set the appropriate tone. This album features

the phantom tones of Elvis Presley, a reporter at a rock concert and, most effectively, 2 guys discussing what sounds like a Burroughs quote: 'A combination of aphrodisiac and venereal disease that will turn the world into one beautiful mindless orgy', what do you think about that? Ah, I don't know, it…sounds kinda crazy to me.' They then launch into off into it.

Whilst all the men play their part special mention has to go to the Rock Prof- Paul Allen- who is The Man when it comes to extended guitar wig-outs. He is the Silver Surfer. He is Galactus. He is an alien sun going nova inside the eye of a god gone mad. Listen to 'Heavy Sea' and feel your mind peeled open by his skilled, dextrous fingers, as he plays the very grooves of your brain like a sitar. Relax as you drift on the solar winds, free from ego and mammalian circuits, sucked back into the womb, warping back to the moment of your conception. Cosmic, man.

No other album this year is going to be able to match that kind of effect, so this gets my vote as 2002's best, for whatever that's worth. The Heads are above such petty considerations though and they've already proved that. They do what they do and if you're along for the ride you're going to enjoy it and if you still don't get it then you never will.

RIK RAWLING 19/12/2002

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Jackie-O Motherfucker

fig. 5

USA ROAD CONE RO CO 024 CD (2000)

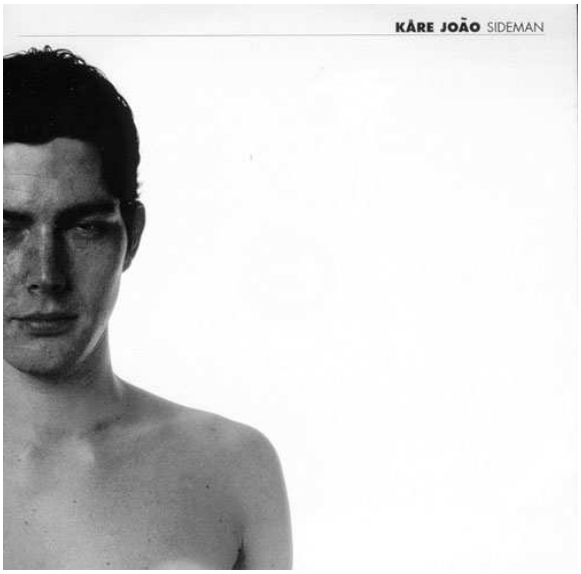
Originally JOMF were a guitar / sax duo relying on tape loops and found sounds to augment their style; over time, they have numbered as many as 20 people but on this recording made in 1999, they were a perhaps more manageable 12 to 15 souls. Tape loops and found sounds are not so much in evidence here - the musicians opted for a mix of avantgarde and American folk and blues, not unlike The No Neck Blues Band's recent Revenant CD *Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me* but with a more warm and genuine feeling and humour. Indeed, after hearing JOMF's 'fig.5', I knew it was curtains for the NNCK Revenant CD in my collection.

Two of the best tracks here are covers of traditional songs: 'Go Down, Old Hannah' has a laidback, almost sultry attitude (though the attitude in the original song was probably born of despair) and a choir singing in a simple, almost naive manner; and 'Amazing Grace' is a mostly improvisational piece of guitars, sax and percussion wandering all over the place until they meet for the original tune in about the seventh or eighth minute of the track. This is followed by 'Beautiful September (We Are Going There)' which is a gorgeous flow of warm honey sung in a wistful manner, full of longing, by the appropriately titled Honey Owen who is accompanied by sparkling country guitar, a loping beat and harmonica amid discreetly placed special effects and echoes that suggest wide spaces and flat horizons leading to everywhere and nowhere at once where an escaped slave or convict may hide without fear of capture.

The other tracks are no less worthy of attention: in particular 'Analogue Skillet' is a forceful guitars-electronics piece, utterly unlike the rest of the album and 'Michigan Avenue Social Club', despite its length, turns out to be a very cohesive piece of improv of sax, guitar, percussion and effects, well-paced, spacey in feel and structured with a fair amount of repetition - American folk and blues meet psychedelic and spaced-out improv!

The CD sleeve design certainly sends out a mixed message: X-ray photos of a skull and what looks like the top of a femur mix with Chinese calligraphy, an alien visage and a collage of a giant tape recorder overlooking a group of people with tape recorders on their shoulders. (Is this particular image meant to say something about the enslavement of humans to technology?) Inserts give information on 'Amazing Grace' and 'Go Down, Old Hannah' and their connection with each other and the American slave trade of the nineteenth century. This odious institution may have officially ended in 1865 but the attitudes and beliefs that birthed it and which were in turn nourished by it (and sent underground by its abolition and the reconstruction that followed) have never really gone away and if anything continue to influence culture, society and even government policies in the US; for example, the so-called War on Drugs, begun about 1914 and still going, victimises the poor and minority groups, especially black people, with its demonisation of crack cocaine (the coke addiction of choice for the poor) vis-a-vis the lenient treatment of users of powdered cocaine who are mostly rich and white, like the daughter of the Florida state governor who gets punished by going to a drug rehab clinic, not prison. I understand that even poor and middle class whites are victimised; fans of The Grateful Dead who are caught with minuscule amounts of LSD at GD concerts face going into the slammer. Very depressing - the fact that the New World Order means a new slavery for many Americans makes *fig.5* a relevant recording in ways even JOMF may not have imagined.

JENNIFER HOR



Kare Joao

Sideman

NORWAY JESTER RECORDS TRICK021 CD (2002)

The cover photos for this record are very striking, featuring the eponymous artist in a state of partial undress, brandishing a handgun and glaring unsteadily into the camera. His skin mottled in shades of porcine scarlet and bubonic green, he looks ill. I was immediately seized with nostalgia for the days when I houseshared with a raging heroin addict who bore an uncanny resemblance to the gentleman here depicted. Replace the gun with a hypodermic syringe, retain the look of deathfucking torpor and clammy abandon….Yes, it's the spitting image! Perhaps, I mused, the crazy sounds of this wholly-unfamiliar Norwegian multi-instrumentalist songwriter will prompt me to take off all my clothes and run around the house sweating and banging needles into my feet? Hope so!

With the awesome power of my highly-evolved third nostril I detected the violet-patchouli aroma of psychedelia hovering miasmically around this artefact, and as the first track, 'Captain Trips' kicked in, I was wondering whether this nuance would prove to be ersatz- merely a stylistic affectation- or the nothing-is-real deal. Visiting the Jester Records website confirmed my suspicions- psychedelia, Can, Spiritualized and 'early Stooges' are cited as reference-points. Fair enough, although this record is less exciting than *Sgt Pepper*, *Tago Mago*, *Pure Phase* or *Fun House*, and by some considerable margin. There isn't much thrust to it. I wanted to be pinned to my seat by G-force as the mothership blasted out of my skull, but 'Captain Trips' creeps along like a blind hippy clutching at the wall: guitarscapes overlapping like curtains of coloured gel, grooves that jog along in a vaguely Klaus Dinger kind of way (and I do mean vaguely), lyrics (written by Anders Bortne) competently alluding to the 'I'm-going-out-of-my-mind' school of psych-shamanism a la Roky Erikson or (God forbid) Hawkwind, but without much bite, hence a little underwhelming. The Hawkwind reference seems appropriate: I'm no expert, but this resembles what I would imagine a Hawkwind release circa 1980 to sound like. I think 'generic' might be the word I'm looking for.

On the plus side, some of the lockjaw grooves and spiralling phase-traps do recall the Boredoms of *Super ae*, albeit at only a fraction of their atom-smashing fury: 'Mission To Cure My Condition' and the closing 'Dark Of Heartness' (ouch!) are both entertaining in this regard. Vocally Kare Joao does a pretty good

talking scream somewhere between Lou Reed and Black Francis, with a portentous 'Voice of God' quality to some of his utterances that (for me) recalls Sergius Golowin ranting about Krishna, or whoever was responsible for the killer track 'Interstellar Shortwave' on Virgin's *Unknown Deutschland* comp of a few years back (Astral Army? Golem? Can't remember). Yeah, I'd say this is ultimately a piece of contemporary diet-Kraut (from Norway- I'd hoped for a more overt death-metal influence, but serve me right for my crass national stereotyping) with elements of cartoon psychxploitation. At its best, it's an unembarrassing invitation to wallow ankle-deep in overfamiliar but warm waters. At its worst, it sounds like Kula Shaker on mandrax: something of a bum trip.

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McLuskys

Do Dallas

UNITED KINGDOM TOO PURE PURE117CD CD (2002)

Almost album of the year (behind The Heads *Under Sided*) which is not bad for a band I've never heard of before, and a Welsh band at that. Unlike so many other people I never fell for this 'Newport is the new Seattle' bollocks that the music press tried to foist off on us. 60ft Dolls. Gorky's Zygotic Mynki. Manic Street Preachers. Where are they now?

Ok, so it brought a couple of interesting acts into the light of day - Super Furry Animals, for example – but by and large it was yet another example of twats in London with no clue and a desperate need to have something to spew out column inches over for the next 3 months until something more interesting happens. And so their blinkered gaze turned to Detroit and New York and anywhere else but South Wales....leaving McLlusky to form in the dark, like a rare and unusual fungus, only this specimen had been dosed with PCP.

It's the sound of men who've spent too much time in front of the television, assaulted by the carnival of crass that all 5 terrestrial channels can summon up the same way dogs can shit. It's the sound of men who've read too many books and now can't face anything more cerebral than the warning on the back of a fag packet. It's is the sound of men who should be waking up in the gutter but inevitably find themselves tucked up in wank-encrusted bed, dreaming of naked schoolgirls and the white gorilla with a horn that used to be in the closing titles of Star Trek.

It's a timely banana skin under the vintage Cuban heel of 3rd generation garage rock and I'm looking forward to seeing it fall on its arse.

McLusky are nuts, basically. Fucking loons. But the madness is borne of intelligence and frustration and the perverse inclination to fuck about with the established formulas. So what do you get for your money? A hell of a racket, played at a speed that makes Guitar Wolf sound like Belle & Sebastian, and lyrics that take the best of Mark E.Smith and Half Man Half Biscuit and twist them via the Burroughs cut-up technique into a gobbledegook that sounds half-smart if you're pissed up and almost genius if you're not. They're the most exciting band I've heard all year and the sheer oomph of their delivery will win you over – or you'd best check to see if your dick has fallen off. Otherwise you'll need to explain how you can resist a song called 'Lightsaber Cocksucking Blues' and an opening line like 'All your friends are cunts.' Elsewhere there's 'Hippies, Hippies everywhere, and not a drop to drink', 'Nick Berry had talent in a previous life', and 'Your mother is a ballpoint pen thief.' Yes, it could almost be written off as 6th form tomfoolery but it's delivered with too much gusto to be mistaken for any kind of tedious adolescent posturing. They go at it with power tools and knock up something basic, functional and not without its own kind of idiot charm. It's certainly 'dumb' (knowing or otherwise), as disposable as a condom and it won't trouble the Radio 2 demographic in any way at all, but if you're looking for some light relief from crap Americans or the English fools who copy them then this might just be what you need.

RIK RAWLING 17/12/2002

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Mudhoney

Since We've Become Translucent

USA SUB POP RECORDS SPCD555 CD (2002)

Fucking Hell, this is good. How long have we had to wait for something this good? Funny it should turn up now in the year of our lord 2002 when every acne-riddled little shit is trading in his decks for a guitar and trying his hand at this 'garage' thing. Even funnier that it should piss from Olympian heights over virtually everything else in it's class and, Shock News, it's made by men in their 30's, some even in their 40's! Not young skinny twats with Rocky Horror hair-dos and the delusional belief that drugs are ace, but 'old men' who should, according to many, have hung up their guitars by now and gone and done something a bit more 'mature' and 'responsible' instead.

Thank fuck they haven't.

This is the 3rd best record of the year, their best since *Superfuzz Bigmuff* and the closest thing we'll ever get to hearing what The Stooges might've sounded like if they'd followed on from *Funhouse* with another album straight away instead of descending into the junk bucket. For a start of, it plays as a complete album, just like *Funhouse*. It's not just a couple of corkers wrapped with filler. Each song is solid in it's own right but shines so much brighter when buffed up alongside it's partners in the tracklist. Another comparison with *Funhouse* is how fucking energized the guys sound – just like The Stooges did when they cut the *Funhouse* Sessions in May 1970.

The difference is, this isn't a young band that has been tour-hardened into a deadly fighting machine, this is a gang of veteran soldiers, back from the wars having licked their major label wounds, eager to rekindle the flame of their youth and ready to share their experience. And, if those *Funhouse* comparisons still don't wash with you, just get your ears around the first track – 'Baby, Can You Dig The Light' which sounds like an extended jam from the *Funhouse* sessions. It's got that same sleazy grind, that same 'raw power' like someone just cut open a powerline in a thunderstorm and it's got that crazy-ass wailing sax and full-on wah-wah guitar sound that we had thought only Ron could do. If this doesn't convince you that the guys are not only paying homage but building on an already rock-solid foundation with something of their own making then you are deaf and dumb and might as well give up now.

The rest of the album is varied in tone – from pissed off to positively upbeat (check out 'Where the Flavor Is') – and is certainly more controlled than their early work (there's nowt as raucous as 'Hate The Police', for example) but not so much that you don't expect shit to go totally insane at any given moment – it's just that you know that they've already done all that and there's really no need. Comparisons beyond The Stooges would have to include The Saints or maybe the MC5 (and, yes, Kramer plays on one track, if you need to know) but most of all you're left with the impression that Mudhoney have finally come into themselves after far too long lost in the wilderness and have made an album that proves you can have some brains behind your rock action. Maybe some of those dumb motherfuckers out there getting all the press could learn a thing or two?

RIK RAWLING 04/01/2003

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www.subpop.com
www.mudclub.com
www.mudhoney.org

Pärson Sound

Pärson Sound

SWEDEN TI'LLINDEN / SUBLIMINAL SOUNDS TILCD02 2 X CD (2001)

Perhaps this double CD set of live and studio recordings by this Swedish underground band constitutes the most remarkable recordings of underground psychedelic music made in a period

(1967 - 68) noted for its burst of creativity and experimentalism in youth culture and music. Many of you know that people like the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix probably hit their creative peak during this time and a number of bands formed, inspired by the psychedelic music and culture, and which were to have a considerable influence, for better and for worse, on the course of 70s rock and pop music: Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Organisation/Kraftwerk, Can, Tangerine Dream, the Amon Düül bands, to name a few. So you're probably thinking that I'd better have a good reason or two for singling Pärson Sound's music out as the most remarkable music of that period in the late 60s, especially as the band's Swedish background means it was outside the supposed US/UK fount of rock creativity and culture.

One reason is that PS, influenced by famous American minimalist Terry Riley who visited Sweden in the mid-60s and played with some of the people who were to form PS in 1967, created a unique fusion of rock, experimentalism and minimalist concepts that even today is mesmerising and overpowering with its relentless rhythms and almost oppressive and engulfing atmosphere and which also prefigures many styles and concepts you may have thought emerged only in the last 20 - 25 years: drone, noise, trance, the use of tape recorders to create music, and field recordings (mainly of bird sounds). Enough said?

All the music on these disks is great but there are some tracks that stand out: on CD1, track 3 features heavy percussion and rhythms that grind their way into your quivering brain cells (prefiguring Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath - well, heavy metal as Black Sabbath virtually established the ground rules for that genre), going on and on and on, it seems, maybe forever. Having two drummers at the time certainly helped. Wailing, almost Middle Eastern-sounding saxophone, an immense rhythm section (in sound, not numbers), the uncompromising minimalism - if you've got neighbours who are giving you hell, just blast this piece at them and watch them all clear out of the neighbourhood in a few seconds flat. Track 4 is no less nerve-shredding. Track 2 has a memorable rhythm which is relatively gentle if solemn. Swedish people have a well-deserved reputation for dourness!

On CD2, the long 'Skrubba' is good but lacks the thick force field of oppressive sound on CD1, perhaps because this particular piece was performed outdoors; on the other hand, you may prefer the crisp, clear sound of the music. Two of the tracks that follow 'Skrubba' point in a more gentle, nostalgic direction but in different ways (one track is acoustic, the other features solo sax) - this leaning towards folk music and a yearning for a simpler, more pastoral lifestyle (again, prefiguring Led Zeppelin's third and fourth albums and various British rock stars' propensity to buy country properties and farms in the 70s, even if for tax reasons) was to become more apparent as Pärson Sound morphed into International Harvester, then Harvester, then Träd, Gras och Stenar in later years. An early aggressive and ominous-sounding version of 'Sov Gott Rose-Marie' also appears on CD2 (this track in a sad, more resigned and fatalistic version features on the International Harvester album of the same name as the track itself - perhaps the idyllic pastoral ideal is actually an admission of defeat and therefore much 70s rock music represents rock's failure to address the problems and issues of the wider societal mainstream).

The double set comes with a booklet which features interviews with PS ex-members and an explanation of the cultural context of mid-60s Sweden and political values of PS leader Bo-Anders Persson which enabled the emergence of PS and its successor groups with their distinctive style of music which only in the last decade has been recognised as being ahead of its time (literally). Those of you who think minimalist music only means geeky types hunched over a laptop or sampler tapping out repetitive sequences of antiseptic plink-plonks in some clinical art gallery space had better think again - this Pärson Sound set will clear blow your minds away! You have been warned.

JENNIFER HOR

http://home6.swipnet.se/~w-64169/

Queens of the Stone Age

Songs For The Deaf

USA INTERSCOPE RECORDS 493 444-0 CD (2002)

I came to QOTSA late and with caution aplenty. The band had been slaveringly praised by *NME*, *Q*, *Uncut*, *Mojo* and even The fucking *Times*! They are the rock band it's OK to like, un-ironically (whereas, admitting a fondness for AC/DC, for example, must be accompanied by apologies for your nostalgic indulgence). When I finally heard their 2001 album *Rated R* I HAD to wonder what all the fucking fuss was about? They had a couple of good songs on there – the ones that kicked ass – and the rest were…mediocre rock-by-numbers with more than just a whiff of 'glam' about them and in 'Monster In Your Parasol' they had forged one of the WORST songs ever recorded. And I'm sorry to say that *Songs For The Deaf* is just more of the same.

I'm not the only person to hear the ghost of The Kinks in their songs but I may be alone in detecting more than just a hint of Spinal Tap there as well. 'You Think I Ain't Worth A Dollar But I Fell Like A Millionaire' revisits their standout track from *Rated R* ('Feelgood Hit of the Summer') with a simple stoner riff and some shouting that will appease the moshpit but if only they could sustain that for an hour or so. They may be an antidote to the *NME*'s pathetic 'New Rock Revolution' with their unfashionable song structures and Josh Homme's decidedly un-'rock' singing (which sounds like Ray Davies after a week spent in Death Valley reading Oscar Wilde) but most of these tracks are just dull, dull, dull. Deep Purple riffs grinding on forever with Homme giving it some 'oh..oh..oh' in the background. His delivery is very English, almost Ozzy-esque at times, and they sound rooted in a different time & place (Norwich Polytechnic 1974, I think) when they're doing anything BUT rock. They sound so limp, so restrained, I just don't fucking get it. Can this really be the same men who were once part of the mighty and monolithic Kyuss?

No-one over the age of 30 will 'get' this record. Something 'hormonal' is lacking and those glam undertones keep coming through – 'Do It Now' is a Slade riff, for fuck's sake! They are the Glitter Band with fuzz pedals – essentially a very, very traditional rock act, which may explain the hype as they are only going to appeal to people who like very, very traditional rock. What am I lacking to not be able to find the 'genius' that lurks at the heart of this really rather staid and uninspired music? While everyone was sucking QOTSA's dick last summer The Cult released the best album of their career and no-one gave a shit. The Cult still know how to ROCK, unashamedly. QOTSA sound like they're embarrassed to be lumped in with the Neanderthals and in trying to be different, end up going nowhere except up their own arses.

RIK RAWLING 23/12/2002

www.interscope.com
www.qotsa.com

Robot Vs. Rabbit

Trading The Witch For The Devil

USA MANDRAGORA RECORDS MR012 CD (2002)

In 'Mandragora', the 5th book in the Druuna comics series by Paulo Eleuteri Serpieri, the world is a foetid wasteland populated by fiendish mutants and clusters of scavenging humans looking to cure the disease that is ravaging what remains of their tribes. In desperation they have resorted to sourcing the 'Mandragora', the seed of a man who's just been hung to death, and to enhance the collection process they forcibly enlist the help of the comely and wanton Druuna who is drugged and made the filling in a man-meat sandwich, only these unfortunate Romeos are not long for this world, no thanks to the nooses around their necks.

Needless to say, Druuna performs admirably and as her paramours reach the vinegar strokes they are hoisted into the air where their balls are cut off by an Albert Steptoe lookalike who catches the sacred gloop on a golden tray.

This happens twice but just as they are milking the second poor bastard a bunch of Darth Vader fan club members with Sten guns kick the doors in and start spraying a load of their own.

Well, Robot Vs. Rabbit I had hoped could make the ideal soundtrack album for that deranged spectacle but, alas, it was not to be. The cover image is a grainy B&W photo of a topless woman with a goat's head. This – and the ridiculous band name – initially suggests a death metal pastiche along the lines of Lawnmower Death but, no, it's clear after just 10 seconds in on track 1 'Jesus told you so' that this lot really do mean it.

Ah, the relief – no irony. And no cartoonish Terrorizer scowls, mullets & black t-shirts either.

Messrs. Gentry, Hepp and Killough are in it for the 'art' and obviously expect a more cerebral response than meatheads smoking blunts in a dark room and crushing beer cans against their foreheads. So what kind of demons do Robot Vs. Rabbit summon up? Errmm, try bass-heavy drones, lots of distortion and go nowhere indie-boy strumming from deep underwater. Track after track of it with very little in the way of variation. It's torture rock for the bong crowd. Fuck it, it's a new genre: 'Stoner Industrial'. They've got the kit and they've got the Ministry albums and the energy to get up of the couch and do something, which earns them some points, but I'm not hearing any ideas, I'm not hearing any sense of passion - it's just one long narcoleptic frown that half-heartedly tries to grab your attention like a tramp trying to sell you his last dog-eared copy of *The Big Issue*. It's annoying and, worst of all, it's boring. Fucking hell, Ground-Zero used to condense everything on display here into one track, and then really get down to business, while Bardo Pond do the 'shades of feedback' thing with so much more style. RvsR need to aim higher than the fade-outs on Nine Inch Nails' remix albums if they're going to have anything to offer in future, unless their *raison d'etre* is to drone us all into submission.

A comment on the Mandragora site describes this album as 'head music for the '00s in the way Pink Floyd was back in times past.' Pink Floyd. Fucking Hell Fire.

RIK RAWLING 23/12/2002

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Sigur Rós

( )

UNITED KINGDOM FAT CAT 5012220946 CD 2002

Well I suppose it's easy for the *NME* to take the piss out of Sigur Rós. Heaven (or Hell) forbid that any band in these days of 'new rock' should even dare to use their frontal lobes for anything other than remembering where the bar is. And they're certainly one of those acts that get lumped in with Godspeed, Low, Mogwai, Boards of Canada, Radiohead and are assumed to be a taste acquired only by sad loners with facial hair problems, woolly hats and a trembling guilt reaction to the wholly un-ironic porn collection that currently has their beds teetering 4 feet off the ground. How 'uncool'. How 'last year'. Time to get with the program. Where's your leather jacket? Where's your bird's-nest haircut? Where's your Strokes poster? Where's our newly-acquired approval for the AC/DC back catalogue? Why aren't you liking what they tell you to like?

When the *NME*'s Stephen Dalton reviewed *( )* he made some fatuous and totally misguided comparisons to Pink fucking Floyd and Spiritualized, using the latter as if it were a dirty word – and yet it wasn't that long ago that those sorry, sorry wankers in Kings Reach Tower were singing the praises of J. Pierce and his cronies. So maybe it's better to fall foul of the likes of the *NME* and music 'journalists' looking for the next fad to be part of? Who needs their 'support' and their 'allegiance' anyway when you're clearly committed to doing your own thing in your own fashion?

For the record – AC/DC are ace, the *NME* talk a load of old shite and Sigur Rós' new album is fucking great. And what's so wrong with a little bit of pretension every now and again? There needs to be a Yin to counterbalance the Yang of The Datsuns and their ilk and this year has offered up career-best albums from the likes of Do Make Say Think, Godspeed You! Black Emperor and now Sigur Rós. Until now I'd always dismissed them as 'post rock' bandwagon jumpers – but I now see how wrong I was to make such a sweeping judgement without first *really* listening to them. The 8 untitled tracks on this untitled album (unless *( )* qualifies as a title) have been carefully honed into shape during European tours that have clearly given the band a confidence and focus that was missing from their early releases. It's effectively a 'suite' in 2 parts – the first being the lighter, more positive half, the second very much its dark twin. It's E vs Heroin. It's dawn vs twilight. Bert vs Ernie.

And it's now almost impossible to explain what this type of music sounds like without resorting to the clichés: shimmering, glacial, arctic, barren, wistful……fuck me, I'm boring myself. If you like piano and guitar, if you think *e.p.* by Mogwai is the best thing they ever did and if you can handle a man singing in a nonsense fairy-gutterspeak language at a pitch normally expected from genital torture then this might just be up your street.

It's music for films that will never be made (though track 4 does feature at the end of Cameron Crowe's *Vanilla Sky*), music for ambitious but not irredeemably-pretentious art gallery openings, music for losing your virginity to on a cold winter's night with the rain falling outside and the only light coming from the haloed streetlights.

It's music for people unafraid of a bit of pretension now and again but it's not music that's up its own arse. It's music that wants to transport the listener beyond their own petty concerns and into a place of mystery and wonder.

Like a soundtrack for the collective unconscious Sigur Rós have tapped into our deepest-held longings and hope-withering fears and made an album of genuine power and majesty and artistry. And you can only take the piss out of something like that if you have no soul.

RIK RAWLING 05/11/2002

www.fat-cat.co.uk
www.sigur-ros.com

The Discurator's Den

RECORDS ARE OUR COUGH-MIXTURE MEDICINE

4Treck

ep1

UNITED KINGDOM 4TRECK 4TRK7EP_1 7" VINYL EP (2002)

A real oddity this- I was delighted to receive it in the post along with some other stuff, it stood out immediately as being an object to play with (as opposed to something stern and forbiddingly serious) and I felt I could really get close to it. Only five tracks, all of them pretty short- one side plays at 45, the other at 33. I love this kind of asymmetry, it's really honest and reflective of a profound truth regarding the Universe that is too subtle for me to even glimpse- the absence which makes possible my apparent presence. Ah, vinyl…obsidian mirror in which the soul burns…

What? Oh, you want me to tell you about the music? Right-o. It's spicy, rich and sweet but without any saccharine edge; sometimes its texture resembles fruit cake in its sticky solidity, other times it's more like a goulash or exotic stew. In case you were wondering, 4tRECk is 'the label and home-produced music project of Sam Callow….a sort of imaginary band. A variety of instruments are employed in a process that generally involves improvisation, some chance and perhaps most importantly a detailed approach to arrangement and structure to create what hopefully might be a new combination of elements and ideas- recorded mainly on 4track tape machine'.

Five tracks, then- all short and to the point, not an ounce of flab to be found. First up is 'Slave Ship', a cover of a song by early '90's friends-of-Nirvana, the Jesus Lizard. I don't know the original, although I do recall that David Yow (Jesus Lizard vocalizer) was celebrated for his onstage masturbation. It's easy to hear the grunge track 'Slave Ship' must have been lurking in 4tRECk's version- the whole thing is a Crimsonoid riff, beefy and menacing. It's the instrumentation that makes it interesting- as with all the tracks, accordion is prominent and lends a unexpectedly plausible sea-shanty feel to proceedings. It's good, and it provokes the idea that maybe accordion would make a refreshing substitute for rhythm guitar in contexts other than this. 'Socasam' has an African feel: Mr Callow claims a Beefheart influence, not the first (or second) thing I'd have thought of, but maybe the forty-sixth. So far, so workable-with.

Second side is even better- 'Eastern Promise' sashays diffidently into the room, accordions and folky balalaika construing a sensitive, quizzical arrangement of a haunting little tune, oddly reminiscent of Van Dyke Parks jamming with Plastic People Of The Universe. Before you fully assimilate it it's gone, and the hilarious emasculation of 'Frankensinatra' is upon you- 'based on a tape loop of a Casio keyboard beat with Sinatra's vocals accidentally emerging through the tape', it's as ill as it sounds, with a ridiculously enfunked middle-eight so free I could cry. Vile antediluvian psychopath Sinatra has the bully-swagger drained from his voice like fluid from a girl's kneecap- he's turned into perfume, exquisitely neutered, providing a soft wallpaper of baby-coos and dependent gurgles. And he sounds like he's enjoying it, ha ha ha!

4tRECk leaves us with the speeding blast of 'Eye of the Tiger', a 'cover' (in the most jazz sense of the word) of the Survivor song of the same name (which was certainly a big hit with me in 1982). What a happening collection of toys he has provided us with! I shall furnish my inner nursery with them. Join me.

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A Handful of Dust

For Patti Smith

FREEWAY SOUND 003 CD [2002?]

Those of you with long memories or who know that there was a Britain before Margaret Thatcher will have guessed that this CD is dedicated to the New York punk musician poet and former music scribe Patti Smith. Recorded in Melbourne, Australia, in 1999, this performance by Bruce Russell and Alastair Galbraith has its ups and downs but overall it passes muster. The performers restricted themselves to violin, wires, guitars and electronics with results that may be too shrill and irritating for some ears to tolerate. The first track 'I am god's finger' starts out slowly and builds steadily with a limited range of sounds and textures until some way past the halfway mark, with the exciting parts bunched up in the last six minutes - where the duo bring in different textures and start sawing wildly at their instruments, the violin flying off at wild tangents. At the time, this was probably interesting for the audience to see how the performers developed the piece, initially with a lot of interplay between the sound and its space, but to hear it on a CD player is a different experience; without the communal atmosphere, the music's flaws are more apparent, the track seeming too slow to unravel and reveal itself, and the good parts all squished up at the end.

The second track '(from a soundtrack to) Babelfield' (sic) is another beast altogether: a shimmering rhythm fades in and out and provides a backdrop against which violin and guitar find their bearings, and set off on a 17-minute journey of gabbling, wobbling noises and meandering strumming. This makes for a cacophonous set which doesn't seem to go anywhere much (there's sort of a resolution towards the end) but the title suggests the piece may be part of a bigger work, and Babelfield implies a conflict may exist between at least two sets of discourse (I'm taking a very literal reading of the title) so we may take the piece at its word; however I don't find the track very dynamic as the pace is more or less pretty constant throughout and there's not a great deal of tension in the busyness of it all.

JENNIFER HOR

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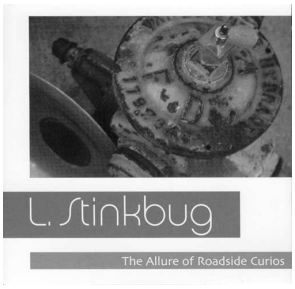

L. Stinkbug

The Allure of Roadside Curios

USA STARLIGHT FURNITURE CO *16 CD (2002)

Scarlet improv reeking of cinnamon from this four-piece outfit who don't fuck about- straight in and twirling rock's intestines round their fingers before Mum wakes up from the mandrake overdose. This lurid memento of two wild summer nights at Bruno's in San Francisco is mercifully free of wank and filibuster- we don't have to wait an eternity for them to get to the point. That's the kind of avant-rock-improv I like: economical without post-rock pseudery or cynical *pontilliste* pretensions. God, some of the most bloated, egotistical music I ever struggled to hear has been, in conventional terms, barely there. As if by saying nothing the dullards get to preen their own little slice of the Void! Anyway, this is happily not the case herein. L Stinkbug have given us warm, organic muck within which to fuck their cartoon demons- complex music which nonetheless eschews abstraction and / or virtuosic hubris, there's a lot to listen to, many paths to follow, few dead-ends. The music *leads* us somewhere, through its willingness to be repetitive, its canny way with a groove. And oh! the My Bloody Valentine shimmerscapes, within which glass faeries cavort! It's like *living* inside *The Faust Tapes*! Every so often they shake up their magic shit-dust and go full-pelt into elephantine snorts of cold tube guitar, clambering naked up the pitiless slopes of Mount Agony! What's that you're shouting above the din? *Larks' Tongues*- Crimson? Good point. Hancock-esque (that's Herbie, not Tony) blasts of distorted Rhodes recalling your Miles Davis wet-dream also. The mood is resolutely dark, though not oppressive or claustrophobic- it's too nimble for that, and the capricious shifts in perspective and density maintain a pleasingly erotic momentum.

L Stinkbug's hands are very capable. I recommend you place your gobbling-turkey brain in them and dig the resultant headache like milkmaids dig blue-skinned Krishna.

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Matmos / J Lesser

Matmos Live with J Lesser

USA VAGUE TERRAIN VAGUE FOUR CD (2001)

The sense of genuinely *outré* experimentation herein intrigues and seduces me, even as I recoil from much of the actual content of the music, my tongue swelling and thickening, my eyes watering, overcome by incontinence. To listen all the way through to this document of 'radio improvisations and live shows from the last five years' is to court Alzheimer's in a macabre tango; in short bursts, more like a nerve-gas attack on the Tube- you're surrounded by sobbing, vomiting strangers somewhere deep underground, with no apparent exit and (more terrifyingly still) no clear idea of what is happening to you. I suppose I could be persuaded that this is how I like to relax, though I'm generally more at home with the more visceral, elemental dimensions of terror and dementia. When it gets quirky on me, when I realise the work in question prioritises *auteur* experimentalism over the life-or-death commitment of true maniacs, I find myself responding to a sense of aloofness in the material (real or projected, I can't tell) and approach it in an anthropological frame of mind, as a Victorian academic-adventurer might laconically observe a shrieking tribe of pygmies from the repose of his hammock, wowing them with a few pyrotechnics if they get too lippy. These collaborations between Matmos (well-known duo with impeccable cv of previous collaborators including Bjork, Mike Paradinas and Otomo Yoshihide) and J Lesser (Kid 606-affiliated noise-manipulator and scion of very many bands and projects with amusing names) are very much in this mould. Bring your mosquito-repellent and a good strong whip.

If there's a joke involved here (and I should think that there is....'moments that could fairly be described as 'silly' are present' confesses the press-release, and for my part I concur) then can someone tell me whom its on? Listening to the music- a sprawling, frictionless *concrete* with the emphasis on slapstick rug-pulling and look-mum-no-hands ventriloquy- I can tell straight away it's not on the artists themselves, who pride themselves (justifiably I'd say) on their eclectic choice of sound-sources (amplified crayfish nerve-tissue, tanks of helium, Polish trains, a frozen stream thawing in the sun among a myriad of equally bizarre others) and who exhibit tenacity and ingenuity in their efforts to meld and juxtapose these sounds in boring ways. (It's unfortunate that in so doing, the sounds acquire an uncanny homogeneity and their differentness becomes a sameness.) The joke's not on the listener- I sense pedagogic intent lurking beneath the offhand pranksterisms, this music wants to culture us, not sneer at our fat-boy huffing and puffing as we struggle to complete its assault-course. And unless it's an impossibly oblique joke, it's not being perpetrated on 'music' as a culturally-circumscribed entity, since there is little or no satirical content, parody, or even reference to other musics (well ok, they cover a Rachel's track- but quite reverently).

My guess would be that the joke governing this project is being played on *anima mundi*, the world-soul; both mother and daughter to the transcending spirit, hers is the face and the movement we trace in every phenomenal image. You might prefer to think of her as the energy-field from which terrestrial imagination can (and does) proceed, in all its phantasmagoric fecundity. Unfortunately, she doesn't much care for pisstakers, which at the end of the day is what lames this record: with no sense of meaning or interrelation between the sound-events, the cavalier liberties it takes seem merely fickle. Art doesn't just happen, you know.

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No Doctors

No Doctors

USA FREEDOM FROM CD 2002

Diabolical riffs. Hopeless trumpeting. Stooge mentality. Can't make out the lyrics. But who cares? They sure don't. Rock-noise incompetence that has me bouncing around the room and whacking my head against the wall in about equal measure.

ALASDAIR WILLIS

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Puffinboy

High livin' round Seven Dials

UNITED KINGDOM FOOLPROOF PROJECTS PRJ 003 7" VINYL SINGLE (2002)

This is the first solo single from Puffinboy, a member of Brighton's Braer Rabbit DJ trio, and it's a fine little curiosity.

A-side and b-side are redundant concepts here as it's all of a piece. One side features a tightly constructed dub loop of 80s synth stabs, crab-scuttle percussion, and the sound of someone slamming their fist against a drum pad, Marty Rev-style. The flip side builds up from a chicken scratch guitar click and a drum track which is at slight odds to the rhythm, then layers more and more sounds on top. The second time I played my copy, it got into one of those uncanny locked grooves which matched the music so perfectly that I didn't notice that the record was stuck for five minutes.

Since Puffinboy is one of those DJ types, it's possible that most everything here is constructed from samples (although one guest gets a guitar credit), but I can't spot any of the sources and it sounds like there's much more going on than just assembly from ready-made parts. Wherever it comes

from, the whole thing is refreshingly brash with sound levels in-your-face and overloaded, just as we like them.

Also overloaded is the single panel cartoon on the cover, which looks like one of those great underground cartoonist jams from *Zap Comix*. Every inch of available space is filled with psychedelic imagery in a panorama showing alien cats taking over the world or maybe just living it up round Seven Dials.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

www.foolproofprojects.co.uk

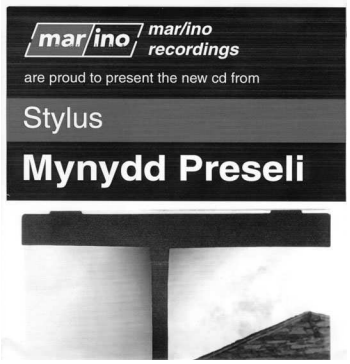
Stylus

Mynydd Preseli

UNITED KINGDOM / USA

MAR/INO NO NUMBER

CD (2001)



Gorgeous ambiences from Dafydd Morgan (aka Stylus), a sound-artist enamoured (as anyone with any taste really ought to be) of the haunting, atemporal landscape of Pembrokeshire in West Wales, a place of aching elemental loneliness where wormholes in spacetime open and close with sublime disregard for causality. It's one of the few areas of Britain yet to be ruthlessly commodified and coated with the hallucinatory slime of desire. To wander the secluded coves and taciturn foothills is to find oneself morphed into waveforms, one's *particular* nature subordinate, for a timeless time, to the prismatic jubilee of luxuriant Being.

Mr Morgan has, by some act of discreet landscape shamanism, performed all us armchair tourists a great service in bringing the unique magic of Pembrokeshire's Preseli mountains to our domiciles- that he has done this and managed to avoid packaging and shaving the holy weirdness they embody with the razor-edge of sentiment is to be robustly applauded, for it's too easy to come over all Wordsworthian when confronted by a landscape that causes the soul pleasure or anguish. On the contrary, I find it near-impossible to detect so much as a trace of the author of these pieces in their impassive ebb and flow- no externalisation of any personal agenda, no sign of struggle, no hero, no victim, simply not there- he lets the esoteric dimension in which nature and culture commingle swim to the forefront of his machines (for these are not field recordings- this music has been composed), and resists any urge to reduce its scope by superfluous anthropomorphising or temporal framing-of-events. Nowhere do we even approach a narrative structure. The sounds are way freer than that.

Although each piece has its own distinct character and atmosphere, certain common elements can be identified: drones of varying texture and gravity; a whirring-helicopter noise that seems to signify shifts in perspective whenever it arises; chimes and cymbals tinkling like the slowly-blinking composite eyes of an insect Buddha; whooshing noises as if pressure is building up and abating; a percussive element which never quite attains to the brazenness of rhythm; and some deeply plangent melodic shadings, sounding like shafts of pale sunlight being coaxed from a dusty, vampiric old Moog. These elements are juxtaposed with sublime deftness and intuitive *rightness*, the balance between the ingredients being precisely that required to generate the peculiarly alchemical reaction that takes place. Each piece focuses on a particular feature within the landscape, retaining elements common to all but rearranging them in such a way as to emphasise different vibes as we move in our dream-bodies around the rocky outcrops and ancient, eroded pathways.

So for example track 2 whirls us up to the peak of Foel Cwmcerwyn, the highest point in the Preselis, immediately inducing a sense of vertigo as whirring sounds thud into the listener's stomach and the groans & drones grow more complex, creating a sensation of weight and gravitational resistance. Ghostly synth tones haunt the horizon like aurora borealis, while itchy, febrile earth-noises make our bones vibrate in familial empathy. The overall effect is startlingly peaceful. Track 3 we're trespassing in the stone circle of Gors Fawr, and out of the mix leap the remains of an abandoned teleportation system between realities- eddies of quantum identity-jelly, unregulated and unstable, better keep back! Yet the melody, plangent and lost, plunges us into a nostalgia so deep that we forget to be afraid.

We're taken along a long-forgotten trade route where the Bronze Age still throbs, persuaded to hunt boar with King Arthur, shown the blue stone that sourced the monoliths of Stonehenge. Every location and encounter is as idiosyncratic as it is interwoven with the whole. What a deep and sustaining source of pleasure and soulmaking I suspect this elegant package (full marks to Mar/ino for the simple yet sumptuous inlays et al) will turn out to be! Highly recommended, and makes me want to check out its companion volumes in Dafydd Morgan's trilogy of music inspired by the landscapes of West Wales (*The Last Seaweed Collecting Hut At Freshwater West*, and *Skomargraph*, both on Ochre Records). More of this sort of thing, please!

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Various Artists

Rough Trade Shops Rock and Roll Vol.1

UNITED KINGDOM ROUGH TRADE CDSTUMM212

0724354265624 2 X CD (2002)

The tracklist to this album reads like an insight into every 'cool' record collection owned by every socially-stunted male in the Western Hemisphere. Now I don't go much for 'cool' but I have to admit that this is a pretty impressive roster of acts. It's actually easier to pick out the donkeys from the mustangs. CD1 delivers with Pixies – 'Tony's Theme', The Cramps – 'Human Fly', and the totally nuts Rocket From The Tombs doing 'Ain't It Fun'. You also get The Birthday Party bringing the noise with 'Big Jesus Trashcan' and The Fall with 'Dr. Buck's Letter' where E. Smith sounds like he's performing from under the table in a Doctor's waiting room. And, there's the under-rated Monster Magnet who I was really surprised to see on here with 'Freakshop USA' and Guitar Wolf's spirited rendition of 'Summertime Blues'. I was also taken with the previously unheard-of Gaunt and STP, both of whom deliver their own pissed-off bags of venom.

CD2 – off to a good start with Mudhoney and 'Hate The Police' and The Saints 'Know Your Product' but it goes haywire for a while after that. What the fuck Suicide are doing on here with 'Rocket USA' I'll never know and it's not until Pussy Galore with 'Aright' at track 7 that my attention was brought back. From then on it's Pere Ubu, The Gories, Rocket From The Crypt, The Make-up and the rarely heard Crime with 'Hotwire My Heart'. This is the disc that tries to be achingly fashionable – The Kills, The Beatings – and suffers as a result but really, I'm being picky when there's absolutely no need for it.

Nor is there any point asking where's Black Flag, The Damned or The Sonics – they'll all be picked up on Vol.2 no doubt. In the meantime, this isn't a 'set' that's going to make it easy for wedding reception DJs but it will remind you why you love rock and roll in the first place and maybe give you a couple of new bands to track down. Which I suspect is the whole point of it. It's the ultimate 'mix tape' for geeks and is sure to inspire fevered debate over tables full of pints up and down the country. Now if that sounds 'sad' then you have no soul – music like this is made to remind us of what life can really feel like – something that's hammered out of us on the anvil of daily life. It's the antidote to the day job and the anxiety and the boredom, and we need it now more than ever. What makes this collection so important is that it's a celebration of the Real Deal, something that cannot be faked. Something pure and elemental and churning deep at the core of each and every one of us.

Whilst my selections are purely subjective I have to ask what the fuck The Electric Eels are doing on there? They're shit and the track selected ('Agitated') is really, really, desperately fucking shit. Elsewhere there's just a poor selection of songs from a band's back catalogue – for example, of all the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion tracks they could choose, they pick '2 Kindsa Love' for fuck's sake!

But these are minor quibbles and are quickly blown away when each disc really kicks into action. Rough Trade are to be commended for putting this together and if this is anything to go by then Vol.2 should be powerful enough to stop wars, raise oases in the desert and get every lonely soul on Earth laid by midnight.

Bring it on.

RIK RAWLING 04/01/2003

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